

SECTION 8

THE INVASION

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Introduction and key findings

1. This Section addresses the framework for and conduct of UK combat operations, specifically:

- the role of the UK in the combat phase of the military campaign;
- transition to post-conflict operations in Iraq; and
- the establishment of the UK's post-conflict Area of Responsibility (AOR) in the South.

2. The Inquiry has not addressed the detailed operational and tactical conduct of the military campaign.

3. A number of issues which are relevant to this Section are addressed in other Sections of the Report, including:

- The UK's military planning for the invasion is addressed in Sections 6.1 and 6.2, including decisions about the forces to be committed, assessments of Iraq's conventional capabilities, the regime's intentions, the possible responses of the regime and the Iraqi people to a military invasion, and the legal framework for the conduct of operations.
- The UK's assessment of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons (CBW) and its ability to deploy them, including its ballistic missile capabilities, are addressed in Section 4.1.
- Lord Goldsmith's advice on the legal basis for military action is addressed in Section 5.
- The arrangements made to provide equipment to forces deploying for operations in Iraq, are addressed in Section 6.3.
- Planning for post-conflict operations, including the military presence and role, which was described as Phase IV of the campaign plan, is addressed in Sections 6.4 and 6.5.
- The UK Government's decision to take military action is described in Section 3.8.
- The MOD's handling of military personnel issues, including casualties, is considered in Sections 16.1 to 16.4.
- The search for weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in Iraq is addressed in Section 4.4.
- The evolution of the US/UK non-military relationship, political developments in Iraq and the adoption of resolution 1483 (2003) are addressed in Section 9.1.

Key findings

- It took less than a month to achieve the departure of Saddam Hussein and the fall of Baghdad.
- The decision to advance into Basra was made by military commanders on the ground.
- The UK was unprepared for the media response to the initial difficulties. It had also underestimated the need for sustained communication of key strategic messages to inform public opinion about the objectives and progress of the military campaign, including in Iraq.
- For any future military operations, arrangements to agree and disseminate key strategic messages need to be put in place, in both London and on the ground, before operations begin.
- The UK acceded to the post-invasion US request that it assume leadership of a military Area of Responsibility (AOR) encompassing four provinces in southern Iraq, a position it then held for six years, without a formal Ministerial decision and without carrying out a robust analysis of the strategic implications for the UK or the military's capacity to support the UK's potential obligations in the region.

The military Coalition

4. The combat phase of military operations is widely judged to have been a success. The Iraqi armed forces were defeated so rapidly by the Coalition that US forces were in Baghdad and Saddam Hussein's regime had fallen by 14 April 2003. On 1 May, just six weeks after launching the invasion, President Bush declared that major combat operations had ended.

5. Those who deployed on the operation and those who planned and supported it, military and civilian, deserve recognition for what they achieved.

6. Coalition Forces were led by General Tommy Franks, the Commander in Chief US Central Command (CENTCOM). The Coalition campaign was designated Operation Iraqi Freedom.

7. Gen Franks recorded in his memoir that, by the third week of March 2003, "total strength in all components – including our Gulf State Coalition allies in Kuwait" numbered 292,000 individuals, including ground forces of around 170,000.¹

8. At a press briefing on 18 March 2003, Mr Richard Boucher, the US State Department Spokesman, gave a "definitive list" of 30 countries² that had agreed to be part of the Coalition, each of which was "contributing in the ways that it deems

¹ Franks T & McConnell M. *American Soldier*. HarperCollins, 2004.

² Afghanistan, Albania, Australia, Azerbaijan, Colombia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, El Salvador, Eritrea, Estonia, Ethiopia, Georgia, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, the Netherlands, Nicaragua, the Philippines, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Turkey, the UK and Uzbekistan.

the most appropriate”.³ Mr Boucher said that “almost all” of the 30 were “associated somehow militarily with the action”. A further 15 countries, which he did not list, were “co-operating”, for example by offering “defensive assets in the event that Saddam resorts to the use of weapons of mass destruction”.

9. The MOD’s first account and analysis of the operation, published in July 2003, gave the total number of Coalition Forces as 467,000.⁴ The MOD also recorded that “some 20 countries offered or provided military forces or use of military bases” and “many others provided crucial assistance with intelligence, logistics and the deployment of combat units”.

10. According to Dr Condoleezza Rice, President Bush’s National Security Advisor in March 2003, a total of 33 countries provided troops in support of the military operation.⁵

11. President Bush put the number of countries providing “crucial support – from the use of naval and air bases, to help with intelligence and logistics” at more than 35.⁶

The UK contribution

12. UK military operations in Iraq between 2003 and 2009 were known by the codename Operation TELIC.

13. At the start of Op TELIC, the UK deployed a large scale ground force and medium scale air and maritime forces, totalling 46,150 personnel, to Iraq.⁷

UK forces already in the Gulf

As described in Section 1.1, after the 1991 Gulf Conflict a Royal Navy frigate or destroyer was permanently deployed in the Gulf as part of a US-led naval force to support the UN arms embargo and controls on the export of oil through the Gulf.

Section 1.1 also describes activity by the Royal Air Force (RAF) in support of the No-Fly Zones in the North and South of Iraq.

A minute describing a briefing provided to Mr Blair by the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) on 15 January 2003, recorded that a total of 2,200 individuals were deployed in the Gulf at that time.⁸ UK forces included 18 combat aircraft, nine combat support aircraft, a number of nuclear-powered submarines, two destroyers/frigates, five Mine Counter Measure vessels, two survey vessels and one Auxiliary Oiler (for fuel).

³ Transcript, 18 March 2003, ‘State Department Noon Briefing, March 18, 2003’.

⁴ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq – First Reflections*, July 2003.

⁵ Rice C. *No Higher Honour: A Memoir of My Years in Washington*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

⁶ White House press release, 19 March 2003, ‘Operation Iraq Freedom: President Bush Addresses the Nation’.

⁷ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

⁸ [Minute MA/CJO\(Ops\) to MA/CJO, 15 January 2003, ‘Briefing to Prime Minister’](#).

14. The MOD's account and analysis of the operation published in July 2003, said:

“Our maritime contribution to the Coalition was the first to be announced, on 7 January 2003, and built on the standing Royal Navy presence in the Gulf. Naval Task Group 2003, led by HMS ARK ROYAL, which was already due to sail that month as a routine deployment to the Gulf and Asia/Pacific regions, was expanded to a much larger force totalling some 9,000 personnel. It included submarines armed with Tomahawk cruise missiles and a significant amphibious capability with the helicopter carrier HMS OCEAN, Headquarters 3 Commando Brigade Royal Marines, 40 Commando and 42 Commando (some 4,000 personnel), and hospital facilities in RFA [Royal Fleet Auxiliary] ARGUS. This was the largest amphibious force deployed since 1982 [the Falklands campaign]. The Task Group would provide force protection, and conduct mine countermeasures operations as well as providing vital sea-based logistics in support of joint force operations on shore.”⁹

15. Between March and September 2003, a total of 38 vessels, including three submarines, and 50 helicopters were deployed by the Royal Navy.¹⁰

16. In relation to ground forces, the MOD stated:

“On 20 January, the Defence Secretary announced the deployment of a major ground force including Reservists, equipped with Challenger 2 tanks, Warrior armoured infantry fighting vehicles, AS90 self-propelled guns, and a range of helicopters. This force, which eventually totalled some 28,000, would be the largest land force deployment since the Gulf Conflict in 1991 ... At the beginning of operations, 16 Air Assault Brigade represented about half the Coalition's air assault capability, and 7 Armoured Brigade provided a significant proportion of its tank forces.”

17. On 6 March 2003, because of a delay in deployment of the US 4th Infantry Division, the MOD expected that 1st (UK) Armoured Division would provide nearly 30 percent of available Coalition tanks in the early stages of the ground campaign.¹¹

18. The army deployment included elements from 38 different units.¹²

19. Describing the deployment of the RAF, the MOD stated:

“The Royal Air Force already maintained a presence of some 25 aircraft and 1,000 personnel in the Gulf, flying sorties over Iraq to enforce the No-Fly Zones and to restrict the regeneration of Iraqi air and Integrated Air Defence capabilities. On 6 February the Defence Secretary announced that the RAF contribution would be increased to around 100 fixed wing aircraft manned and supported by a further

⁹ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq – First Reflections*, July 2003.

¹⁰ Ministry of Defence, *Operation in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

¹¹ [Letter Watkins to Manning, 6 March 2003, 'Iraq: Options for Employment of UK Land Forces'](#).

¹² Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

7,000 personnel ... In addition, the Joint Helicopter Command deployed more than 100 helicopters, including Puma and Chinook support helicopters.”¹³

20. Air Chief Marshal Sir Glenn Torpy, UK Air Contingent Commander in 2003, wrote:

“In all, the UK [RAF] contributed some 8,100 personnel, together with 113 fixed wing and 27 rotary wing aircraft to the operation; these assets were distributed across eight Deployed Operating Bases in seven countries.”¹⁴

21. ACM Torpy told the Inquiry that the air campaign had needed UK air-to-air refuelling capability, and that the US had specifically requested airborne early warning aircraft and air defence aircraft for the start of the campaign.¹⁵ It had also wanted air-launched precision guided weapons.

Command and control

22. Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, Chief of the Defence Staff, was in overall command of UK forces, but delegated Operational Command to Lieutenant General John Reith, Chief of Joint Operations (CJO).¹⁶ Adm Boyce’s Directive to Lt Gen Reith is addressed in Sections 6.2 and 6.5.

23. Lt Gen Reith, who remained in the UK, exercised command through PJHQ to Air Marshal Brian Burrige, the UK National Contingent Commander (NCC).

24. AM Burrige, who was collocated with CENTCOM in Qatar, provided the link within the US command structure for the national direction of UK forces, to ensure that they would only undertake specific missions approved by UK commanders.

Appointment of the UK National Contingent Commander

AM Burrige told the Inquiry that he was designated as the UK National Contingent Commander (NCC) in October 2002.¹⁷

In December 2002, both AM Burrige and Gen Franks deployed their headquarters to Qatar in preparation for Exercise Internal Look.¹⁸ AM Burrige told the Inquiry that his headquarters consisted of “about 240 people”.

On 14 March 2003, Adm Boyce told Mr Hoon, that AM Burrige’s role was “to provide a link for national political control of the employment of British Forces”.¹⁹

¹³ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq – First Reflections*, July 2003.

¹⁴ Statement, 14 June 2010, page 1.

¹⁵ Public hearing, 18 January 2011, pages 6-8.

¹⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Operation in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

¹⁷ Public hearing, 8 December 2009, page 3.

¹⁸ Public hearing, 8 December 2009, page 9.

¹⁹ Minute CDS to SofS [MOD], 14 March 2003, ‘Op TELIC Command and Control’.

Adm Boyce wrote that, in Qatar:

“... the NCC co-ordinates the activities of UK forces in theatre to ensure they are positioned and resourced to carry out approved tasks. He will also identify any potential changes to the plan that may impact on UK forces, and seek approval for any changes from the JC [Joint Commander]. If the UK forces are at any stage asked to do anything that we would not wish them to, the NCC is empowered to intervene – this is known as playing the red card”.

Lt Gen Reith issued a Directive to AM Burrige on 19 March which set out the relationship between the CJO and NCC.²⁰ That stated:

“I want a very clear understanding of the balance of responsibility between our two headquarters. You are responsible for the integration of national effort into the Coalition campaign. Your focus is to be forward and you are to act as my representative in the CF HQ [Coalition Forces Headquarters]. In this regard, I underscore the importance of ensuring a clear understanding of UK capabilities and intentions within the Coalition and of monitoring closely, and influencing, US planning as it develops. Within my intent and the powers delegated to you as the National Contingent Commander, you have the lead in the direction of UK forces in the execution of those tasks authorised by me. You are to keep me informed of the situation in the JOA [Joint Operational Area], especially on developments that may affect national political objectives or require changes to the ROE [Rules of Engagement] or tasking of UK forces. My focus will be the OPCOM [Operational Command] of the forces deployed and the definition of the national effort to be made available to the Coalition campaign. Proposals for change to the agreed tasks of the joint force will be authorised and resourced by me, informed by your understanding of Coalition intent and your early identification of possible branch plans. In this I shall be working closely with the MOD and the three single Services.”

25. Three UK “Contingent Commanders”, Land, Air and Maritime, operated under the national command of AM Burrige and the tactical control of US Component Commanders “reflecting many years of NATO interaction and recent bilateral experience in the Gulf region”.²¹

26. Major General Robin Brims, the UK Land Contingent Commander, reported to Lieutenant General Jim Conway, Commander US 1st Marine Expeditionary Force (1 MEF), who in turn reported to Lieutenant General David McKiernan, Commander of the Coalition Forces Land Component Command (CFLCC).²² Maj Gen Brims was also the General Officer Commanding 1 (UK) Div during the invasion.

27. Air Vice Marshal Glenn Torpy, the UK Air Contingent Commander, reported to Lieutenant General Buzz Moseley, the US Air Component Commander.

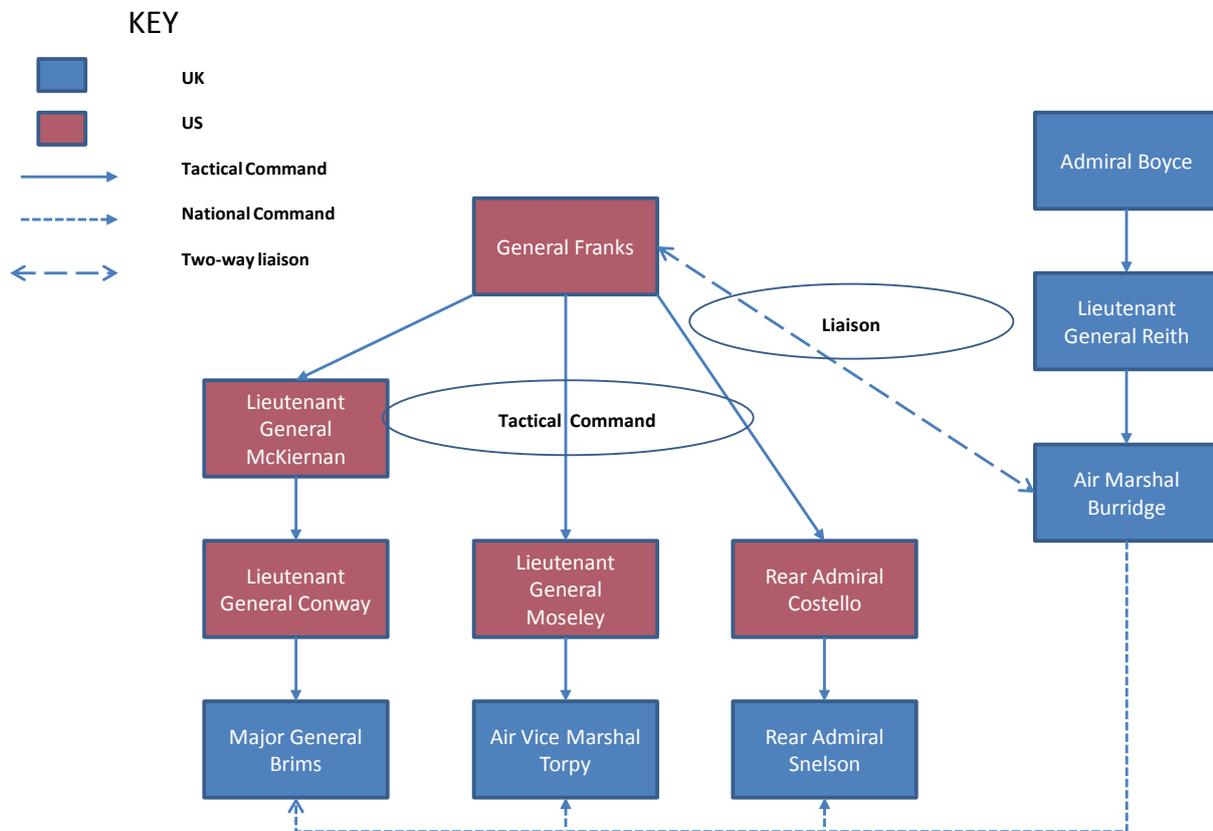
²⁰ Directive Reith to Burrige, 19 March 2003, ‘Joint Commander’s Directive to the UK National Contingent Commander Operation TELIC’.

²¹ Ministry of Defence, *Operation in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

²² Public hearing, 8 December 2009, page 27.

28. Rear Admiral David Snelson, the UK Naval Contingent Commander, reported directly to Rear Admiral Barry Costello, Coalition Maritime Component Commander.

Figure 1: Command and control arrangements



29. A description of the structures through which strategic direction of the campaign was conducted can be found in Section 2.

The US campaign plan

30. At the start of operations, the US campaign plan had four phases and envisaged that it would take up to 125 days to destroy Iraqi forces and remove Saddam Hussein's regime.

31. The plan was based on an assumption that the scale and speed of the invasion would undermine the will of the Iraqi armed forces to fight, and could lead to the collapse of the regime or its removal.

32. The US plan for the invasion of Iraq, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OPLAN 1003 V), is described in Gen Franks' memoir *American Soldier*.²³ Gen Franks wrote:

"It was a complex plan. Our ground offensive would proceed along two main avenues of advance from the south, each route having several axes. Army forces,

²³ Franks T & McConnell M. *American Soldier*, HarperCollins, 2004.

led by the 3rd Infantry Division, would attack up lines of march west of the Euphrates River in a long arc that curved from lines of departure in Kuwait to reach Baghdad. The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force – divided into reinforced Regimental combat teams – would follow the road network along the Tigris River, farther east. The Army and Marines would link up to destroy any surviving Republican Guard units south of the capital. The 4th Infantry Division would advance south from staging areas in Turkey, provided we could persuade the Turks to lend us their territory for a few months. A division-plus-size British ground force would pivot northeast out of Kuwait and isolate Basra, forming a protective cordon around the southern oil fields. And US, Brit and Australian Special Operations Forces would control Iraq’s western desert, preventing the regime freedom of action to launch long-range missiles toward Jordan and Israel.”

33. The plan had four “Phases”, described by Gen Franks as:

- Phase I – Preparation;
- Phase II – Shape the Battlespace;
- Phase III – Decisive Operations; and
- Phase IV – Post-Hostility Operations.

34. Phase I included establishing an “air bridge” to transport forces into the region, and securing “regional and international support for operations”. During Phase II, separate air operations would begin, intended to “shape the battlespace” before the start of ground operations.

35. Gen Franks wrote that during Phase II the US would “launch air and Special Operations Forces into Iraq ... to destroy key target sets and set conditions for deploying heavy units”.

36. Special Operations forces would deploy to destroy Iraqi observation posts along the western border and seize control of potential missile-launching sites – “Scud baskets” – and airstrips in Iraq’s western desert.

37. Phase II of the plan also included dropping thousands of leaflets in the southern No-Fly Zone warning Iraqi troops against the use of WMD and intended to prevent sabotage of the oilfields.

38. During Phase II, targets would not include Iraq’s electrical power grid, power plants, transformer stations, pylons and electricity lines, so as to preserve the national infrastructure and protect electricity supplies for hospitals.

Information operations

Information operations were an integral part of the military plan. They were to be “employed to create doubt and disaffection against the regime, aggressively undermining its legitimacy”.²⁴

In its first account and analysis of the operation, published in July 2003, the MOD described the information campaign as:

“... designed to influence the will of the Iraqi regime and the attitudes of ordinary Iraqi people in support of overall campaign objectives. It also articulated the [UK] Government’s strategy to our allies and partners, and others in the region and elsewhere who were either non-aligned or opposed to Coalition policy on Iraq. This multi-level approach, in conjunction with the US and other allies, required an integrated, agile campaign based on open reporting and transparency. Most effort was devoted to opinion forming media, including terrestrial television, the press, satellite and cable bearers, Internet and interactive media and ultimately bulk leaflet drops over Iraq itself.”²⁵

In a subsequent report on lessons from the conflict, the MOD stated that media infrastructure within Iraq was only targeted if there was “sufficient evidence that it was being used by the Iraqi regime for command and control purposes”.²⁶

One element of the information operations campaign was intended to “seek to persuade Iraqi military units not to fight”.²⁷

Adm Boyce told the Inquiry that:

“... part of the battle plan was that we got messages ... to Iraqi formations that if they did certain things and looked [in] the other direction, we would walk past them, because ... we saw – the importance of actually maintaining the Iraqi Army as being the infrastructure to maintain sensible good order once the country had been defeated and indeed also keeping professionals, such as people who subsequently we have not been able to use who were Ba’athists, given the fact that everybody had to be a Ba’athist to be a professional; you had to be a card-carrying member. And also not trashing the joint, if I can use that expression.”²⁸

Mr Geoff Hoon, Defence Secretary from 1999 to 2005, told the Inquiry that:

“... planning for what was described by the Americans as effects-based warfare was very successful ... quite quickly, large numbers of Iraqi soldiers ... simply went home.”²⁹

39. In Phase III of the plan, Gen Franks’ objective was to reach Baghdad as soon as possible, bypassing Iraqi forces if necessary, to secure the acquiescence of the

²⁴ [Letter Watkins to Manning, 11 March 2003, ‘Iraq: The Military Plan’.](#)

²⁵ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: First Reflections*, July 2003.

²⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

²⁷ [Minute Reith to COSSEC, 11 March 2003, ‘Phase 4A – A UK Response’.](#)

²⁸ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 99.

²⁹ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, page 111.

Iraqi population and the early collapse of Saddam Hussein's regime.³⁰ Gen Franks did not want to give Saddam Hussein the opportunity to muster an effective defence, especially the use of WMD, or to create major environmental damage as he had in the 1991 Gulf Conflict.

40. Major General Graham Binns, who commanded 7 Armoured Brigade, told the Inquiry:

“General Franks' view was that he wouldn't enter any urban areas until he had to and that he was prepared to block and bypass and isolate until he got to Baghdad.”³¹

41. UK concerns about the Iraqi regime's plans to defend Baghdad, and the implications of having to fight through urban areas for control, are set out in Section 6.2.

42. After “wargaming” the invasion plan, Gen Franks concluded that several phases could be combined into a single simultaneous effort:

“... *five days* to position the final airbridge after the President made a decision to launch the operation, *eleven days* to flow the final pieces of the 'start force', *sixteen days* of combined air and special operations attacks against key targets, and a total of *125 days* to complete the destruction of Iraqi forces and the removal of the regime.”³²

43. In the event, Gen Franks adjusted the timing further as a result of intelligence which suggested that preparations were being made to destroy the Rumaylah oilfields, so that ground forces would enter Iraq after just 24 hours of air operations.

The UK's planned role in offensive operations

44. The military plan was approved on 14 March, including roles for 7 Armoured Brigade and 16 Air Assault Brigade at an early stage of the operation.

45. When Mr Blair agreed to the deployment of a large scale ground force on 17 January 2003 (see Section 6.2), it was envisaged that:

- 3 Commando Brigade and maritime and air forces would all have combat roles in the initial stages of an invasion;
- “approximately 10 days later”, the Divisional Headquarters and 16 Air Assault Brigade would “relieve US forces in an area south of Basra and the Euphrates, including the Rumaylah oilfields”; and
- 7 Armoured Brigade “could protect the right flank of the US 1st Marine Expeditionary Force as it advanced north”. That would “include securing Basra International Airport and isolating (but not entering) Basra itself”.³³

³⁰ Franks T & McConnell M. *American Soldier*, HarperCollins, 2004.

³¹ Private hearing, 2 June 2010, page 8.

³² Franks T & McConnell M. *American Soldier*, HarperCollins, 2004.

³³ [Letter Hoon to Blair, 16 January 2003, 'Iraq: UK Land Contribution'](#).

46. The roles which UK forces would play during combat operations were set out in a letter from Mr Peter Watkins, Mr Hoon's Principal Private Secretary, to Sir David Manning, Mr Blair's Foreign Policy Adviser, on 11 March.³⁴

47. The UK role within the US plan was described as "crucial in all three operating environments". The role of UK Special Forces is described in a Box later in this Section.

48. Mr Watkins wrote that the plan required 3 Commando Brigade to seize the oil infrastructure on the al-Faw Peninsula in the early hours of the operation, by means of a combination of amphibious and helicopter assault. The US 15th Marine Expeditionary Unit (15 MEU) was placed under the command of HQ 3 Commando Brigade for the operation to capture the port of Umm Qasr.

49. The Royal Navy was to deliver the amphibious forces and to ensure the safe transit of personnel and equipment by sea. Mine Counter Measure (MCM) vessels were to clear the approaches to Umm Qasr.

50. UK submarines were tasked with delivering Tomahawk Land Attack Missiles (TLAMs) for initial air strikes.

51. Royal Navy ships, embarked helicopters and RAF maritime patrol aircraft were to maintain a "maritime blockade" of the Iraqi coast and provide force protection against Iraqi and terrorist threats. MCM vessels were to clear mines from Iraqi ports and waterways.

52. The RAF was to deliver offensive air strikes and provide close air support to Coalition, not just UK, forces.

53. The plan also called for the RAF to provide air defence, air-to-air refuelling and ISTAR (Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance) capabilities, maritime patrol aircraft and transport and logistics support.

54. The MOD's account and analysis of the operation published in July 2003 described the main tasks of the air campaign as:

- to neutralise the Iraqi air force and Integrated Air Defence system;
- to conduct strategic attacks against regime targets;
- to provide air support to Coalition land forces;
- to deter and counter the threat from theatre ballistic missiles, especially in the west of Iraq; and
- to destroy the Republican Guard divisions.³⁵

55. Mr Watkins wrote that, following the initial operations, 1 (UK) Div, operating under the command of the US 1 MEF, was to follow US forces into Iraq to secure the South,

³⁴ [Minute Watkins to Manning, 11 March 2003, 'Iraq: The Military Plan'](#).

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

including the port/city of Umm Qasr, the Rumaylah oilfields, the al-Faw Peninsula, and the area around Basra.³⁶ That was to permit 1 MEF to continue its advance north as soon as possible.

56. 1 (UK) Div's role was to isolate Basra and, if required, defeat Iraqi forces in the vicinity. The plan did not, however, explicitly require UK forces to enter Basra. If the environment was sufficiently permissive, UK forces would plan to enter Basra City to restore or maintain stability.

57. In his letter of 11 March, Mr Watkins informed Sir David that Lt Gen McKiernan had "developed a plan that would expand the UK Area of Operations (UK AO) by up to 150km up to and beyond al-Amara (but short of al-Kut)". Mr Hoon judged that Lt Gen Reith:

"... should be authorised to expand the Phase III Area of Operations northwards if that is required to achieve a satisfactory outcome to Phase III. The focus for UK in Phase IV should, however, remain the South-Eastern Area of Operations as currently understood."

58. The UK AO as understood at that time included most of Basra province and small parts of Muthanna and Dhi Qar.

59. Mr Watkins also identified other scenarios in which the UK land component could provide additional combat power given "delays in the deployment of some US forces". Those included inserting a light force into central Iraq and armoured options in support of the US "Main Effort" if the UK "could tip the balance", although that would "require US logistic and medical support" and a "benign" situation in the UK AO.

60. Mr Watkins advised that "to reinforce key gaps in US capability and facilitate a rapid US advance" from the South, the UK could provide:

- a chemical and biological warfare detection and decontamination capability;
- specialist engineers; and
- specialist bridging capabilities, in case Iraqi forces destroyed the bridge over the Euphrates at Nasiriyah.

61. Mr Hoon's view was that the UK should:

- confirm the availability of those specialist capabilities;
- be "forward leaning" on extending the AO northwards, "provided that UK commanders judge this sensible in circumstances at the time"; and
- be prepared to "continue exploring options for reinforcing US forces at decisive points ... but without commitment at this stage".

³⁶ [Minute Watkins to Manning, 11 March 2003, 'Iraq: The Military Plan'](#).

62. Following meetings held by Mr Blair on 11 and 13 March (see Section 6.2), the plan was formally approved on 14 March.³⁷

63. Lt Gen Brims told the Inquiry:

“... our principal task was to protect the flank of the US forces as they advanced ... towards Baghdad.

“... as well as the flank protection, we also had to seize and protect the oil infrastructure, and stopping the oil infrastructure being wilfully damaged, was a key concern ... [W]e would have to be in the al-Faw [Peninsula] because that’s actually the critical bit ... and we had to capture the port of Umm Qasr.”³⁸

64. Gen Reith described 1 (UK) Div’s role to the Inquiry as “a ‘second echelon force’ to basically deal with anything that the main effort and the [US] Marines bypassed to get to Baghdad”.³⁹

The invasion

The decision to take military action

65. On 17 March, Cabinet endorsed the decision to give Saddam Hussein an ultimatum to leave Iraq and to ask the House of Commons to endorse the use of military action, if necessary, against Iraq.

66. The events after the Security Council discussion on 7 March which led to the decision to take military action against Iraq are described in detail in Section 3.8.

67. A special meeting of Cabinet was held on 17 March, which endorsed the decision to give Saddam Hussein an ultimatum to leave Iraq and to ask the House of Commons to endorse the use of military action, if necessary, against Iraq.⁴⁰

68. Lord Goldsmith’s advice on the legal basis for military action is addressed in Section 5.

69. President Bush issued the ultimatum giving Saddam Hussein 48 hours to leave Iraq at 8pm (Eastern Standard Time) on 17 March.⁴¹

70. The House of Commons approved a Government motion seeking support for the decision that the UK “should use all necessary means to ensure the disarmament of Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction” on 18 March.⁴²

³⁷ [Letter Manning to Watkins, 14 March 2003, ‘Iraq: The Military Plan’.](#)

³⁸ Public hearing, 8 December 2009, pages 30-31.

³⁹ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, page 28.

⁴⁰ [Cabinet Conclusions, 17 March 2003.](#)

⁴¹ The White House, 17 March 2003, ‘President says Saddam Hussein must leave within 48 hours’.

⁴² House of Commons, *Official Report*, 18 March 2003, columns 760-911.

71. Sir David Manning wrote to Dr Rice formally agreeing to US use of UK bases for operations against Iraq.⁴³

The Chief of the Defence Staff's Directive

72. **Adm Boyce issued an Execute Directive to Lt Gen Reith authorising final preparations for military operations on 18 March.**

73. On 18 March, Mr Watkins wrote to Sir David Manning, stating:

“Following the vote in Parliament this evening, the Defence Secretary will need to authorise the start of final preparations to launch military action. The first step will be the issue of the Chief of Defence Staff's Directive to the Commander Joint Operations. This Directive sets out the general ‘governance’ arrangements for Operation TELIC, the codename given to the involvement of UK Armed Forces in the military campaign to remove the threat from Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. Its issue has the immediate effect of reducing to four hours the notice to move of lead elements of the UK force (eg the Royal Marine Commandos) and authorising other pre-positioning activities. CDS intends to issue the Directive at 2300 tonight, together with an implementation signal; the latter will allow action to begin not before 1800 tomorrow.”⁴⁴

74. Adm Boyce duly issued an Execute Directive to Lt Gen Reith on 18 March to implement Op TELIC “as agreed, promulgated and ordered in Coalition plans”.⁴⁵

75. The Directive reflected the UK's strategic objectives for Iraq announced by Mr Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary, on 7 January (see Section 3.6).⁴⁶

76. Adm Boyce described the Government's “Political Goal” as:

“To rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction (and their associated programmes and means of delivery, including prohibited ballistic missiles).”⁴⁷

77. The “Strategic End State” for Iraq was defined by Adm Boyce as:

“As rapidly as possible for Iraq to become a stable, united, and law abiding state, within its present borders, co-operating with the international community, no longer posing a threat to its neighbours or to international security, abiding by all its international obligations and providing effective government for all its people.”

⁴³ Letter Manning to Rice, 18 March 2003, [untitled].

⁴⁴ Letter Watkins to Manning, 18 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Military Operations’.

⁴⁵ [Minute CDS to CJO, 18 March 2003, ‘Op TELIC: Authorisation for Military Operations in Iraq’](#).

⁴⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 7 January 2003, columns 4-5WS.

⁴⁷ [Minute CDS to CJO, 18 March 2003, ‘Chief of Defence Staff Execute Directive to the Joint Commander for Operation TELIC \(Phases 3 and 4\)’](#).

78. Adm Boyce defined the “Strategic Military Objective” as:

“To support the Coalition effort, within allocated resources, to create the conditions in which Iraq is disarmed in accordance with its obligations under UNSCRs [UN Security Council Resolutions].”

79. Adm Boyce directed Lt Gen Reith to “assume the UK Phase IV AO will be centred on Basra”.⁴⁸ In line with the military plan approved by Mr Blair on 14 March, the Directive stated that, to “assist the Coalition in a timely and successful Phase III and to help in shaping Phase IV conditions in the UK AO”, Lt Gen Reith should exploit no further north than an east – west line running 90km south of al-Kut, ending at a point 50km north-east of al-Amara.

80. Adm Boyce’s order to Lt Gen Reith stated:

- “My Directive provides initial planning guidance on post-conflict operations (Phase IV)”; and
- “further planning guidance for Phase IV will be issued separately”.

81. The language on military tasks for the post-conflict period was unchanged from the version of the Directive dated 4 March (see Section 6.5). Tasks included:

“h. Protect, and be prepared to secure, essential Iraqi political, administrative and economic infrastructure from unnecessary destruction in order to reassure the Iraqi people and facilitate rapid regeneration.

...

k. Deter opportunistic inter-ethnic and inter-communal conflict.

l. Within available resources, be prepared to support humanitarian efforts to mitigate the consequences of conflict.

m. As quickly as possible, establish a safe and secure environment within which humanitarian aid agencies are able to operate.

...

p. If directed, be prepared to contribute to the reform of Iraq’s security forces.”

82. The Directive retained the reference from the 4 March draft to Adm Boyce’s “current intent ... that the UK should aim to draw down its deployed force to medium scale within four months of commencing offensive operations.”

⁴⁸ [Minute CDS to CJO, 18 March 2003, ‘Op TELIC: Authorisation for Military Operations in Iraq’ attaching Paper ‘Chief of Defence Staff Execute Directive to the Joint Commander for Operation TELIC \(Phases 3 and 4\)’.](#)

83. The 18 March Directive remained in force until superseded by version three on 30 July.⁴⁹

Offensive operations begin

84. The US took the decision to accelerate offensive operations late on 19 March.

85. The ultimatum calling for Saddam Hussein to leave Iraq issued by President Bush on 17 March expired at 0100 GMT on 20 March.

86. In her memoir, Dr Rice wrote that covert operations with “British, Polish, Australian and US Special Forces” were due to begin on the night of 19/20 March.⁵⁰

87. The main ground attack was scheduled to begin at 2130 on 20 March.⁵¹ The air campaign to suppress enemy defences and attack strategic targets was to be launched at 2100 on 21 March.

88. At the first Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 19 March, Mr John Scarlett, Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), provided an update on the intelligence picture “highlighting Iraqi military deployments and the poor morale of Iraqi forces”.⁵²

89. Adm Boyce stated that the “British forces were balanced and ready for action”; and that the “US military were well advanced in their preparations for immediate humanitarian relief”.

90. The minutes of the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 19 March reported that military planners were looking at accelerating the plan “in anticipation of an early collapse of the Iraqi 51st Division in the South”.⁵³

91. A joint minute from Mr Straw and Mr Hoon to Mr Blair, about the UK military contribution to a post-conflict Iraq, is addressed in Section 6.5.⁵⁴

92. President Bush wrote in his memoir that he convened “the entire National Security Council” on the morning of 19 March where he “gave the order to launch Operation Iraqi Freedom”.⁵⁵

93. Mr Blair made a televised “address to the nation” that evening, setting out why UK forces were taking part in military action in Iraq.⁵⁶ The details are set out in Section 3.8.

⁴⁹ Minute CDS to CJO, 30 July 2003, ‘Chief of the Defence Staff Executive Directive to the Joint Commander Operation TELIC Edition 3’.

⁵⁰ Rice C. *No Higher Honour: A Memoir of My Years in Washington*. Simon & Schuster, 2011.

⁵¹ Franks T & McConnell M. *American Soldier*. HarperCollins, 2004.

⁵² Minutes, 19 March 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

⁵³ [Minutes, 19 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting](#).

⁵⁴ [Minute Straw and Hoon to Blair, 19 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Military Contribution to post-conflict Iraq’](#).

⁵⁵ Bush GW. *Decision Points*. Virgin Books, 2010.

⁵⁶ The National Archives, 19 March 2003, *Prime Minister’s Address to the Nation*.

94. Shortly before midnight on 19 March, the US informed Sir David Manning that there was to be a change to the plan and US airstrikes would be launched at 0300 GMT on 20 March.⁵⁷

95. From 0230 GMT, targets in and around Baghdad were attacked by US aircraft and TLAMs.⁵⁸ The Iraqi response to the attacks included firing five surface-to-surface missiles at Kuwait.

96. General Richard Myers, Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, stated that:

“... we took advantage of a leadership target of opportunity in Baghdad. Specifically we struck at one of the residences in south-eastern Baghdad, where we thought the [Iraqi] leadership was congregated.”⁵⁹

97. Gen Franks described the intention of the attacks as “a true decapitation strike”; “Killing Saddam Hussein and his two sons would cripple the regime.”⁶⁰

98. Gen Franks recorded in his memoir that by 0900 (local time) on 20 March, Special Operations forces in the western desert controlled 25 percent of Iraq. Special Operations forces in the North had “linked up with Kurdish Peshmerga guerrillas and were deployed along the Green Line separating the Kurdish Autonomous Zone (KAZ) from the rest of Iraq – helping fix the enemy divisions in the north”.

The launch of the main offensive

99. The main invasion of Iraq began early on 20 March.

100. Early on the morning of 20 March, US forces (15 MEU) crossed into Iraq and seized the port area of Umm Qasr before heading north, encountering stiff resistance but achieving all their critical objectives ahead of time.⁶¹

101. Adm Boyce informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 20 March that, “with reports of the disintegration of Iraqi units in the South, the Coalition was ready for the possible need to intervene on the ground earlier than planned to stabilise the situation”.⁶²

102. Cabinet was informed of military developments on 20 March and told that the military intention was to disable the command and control machinery as soon as possible as it controlled the use of CBW.⁶³ The main operation would start very shortly. The air attack would look overwhelming in its scale and intensity, but it was aimed

⁵⁷ Letter Manning to McDonald, 20 March 2003, ‘Iraq’.

⁵⁸ Letter Watkins to Manning, 20 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Military Action’.

⁵⁹ GlobalSecurity.org, 21 March 2003, *DoD News Briefing – Secretary Rumsfeld and General Myers*.

⁶⁰ Franks T & McConnell M. *American Soldier*. HarperCollins, 2004.

⁶¹ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

⁶² Minutes, 20 March 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

⁶³ Cabinet Conclusions, 20 March 2003.

precisely at regime and military targets. Precision weapons would be used to minimise civilian damage and casualties.

103. Mr Blair concluded that Saddam Hussein's strategy would be to try to draw the Coalition into the cities to maximise civilian casualties and generate a "clamour" for military action to cease. "In extremis", Saddam Hussein would probably use chemical and biological weapons, some of which it was believed were deployed with Iraqi forces.

104. In their conversation at 1600 on 20 March, Mr Blair and President Bush discussed the previous night's events, the possibility of "catastrophic success" in the event of a sudden "melt-down" of Saddam Hussein's regime, followed by reprisals by locals against the Ba'ath Party.⁶⁴ They also discussed their planned meeting at Camp David.

105. In a statement to the House of Commons that afternoon, Mr Hoon said:

"President Bush announced at 3.15 this morning on behalf of the Coalition that operations had begun with attacks on selected targets of military importance. Those attacks were carried out by Coalition aircraft and cruise missiles on more than one target in the vicinity of Baghdad, following information relating to the whereabouts of very senior members of the Iraqi leadership. Those leaders are at the very heart of Iraq's command and control system, responsible for directing Iraq's weapons of mass destruction ...

"In addition to those attacks, Coalition Forces yesterday carried out certain preliminary operations against Iraqi artillery, surface-to-surface missiles, and air defence systems ... Those were prudent preparatory steps ... designed to reduce the threat to Coalition Forces in Kuwait ...

"British forces are already engaged in certain military operations, although the House will understand why I cannot give further details at this stage."⁶⁵

106. Mr Hoon warned that the Government would not provide a "running commentary" on events during military operations, but oral statements would be made "as and when necessary" and summaries would be placed in the Library of the House of Commons and the Vote Office "as warranted by the day's events".

107. In his statement, Mr Hoon said that he would place a copy of the Government's military campaign objectives in the Library of the House of Commons later that day.

108. The document, which had been approved by Lord Goldsmith, the Attorney General (see Section 6.2), said that the UK's overall objective for the military campaign was:

"... to create the conditions in which Iraq disarms in accordance with its obligations under UNSCRs and remains so disarmed in the long term."⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Letter Cannon to McDonald, 20 March 2003, 'Iraq: Prime Minister's conversation with Bush'.

⁶⁵ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 20 March 2003, columns 1087-1088.

⁶⁶ [Paper, 18 March 2003, 'Iraq: Military Campaign Objectives'](#).

109. In aiming to achieve the objective as swiftly as possible, the document stated that “every effort will be made to minimise civilian casualties and damage to essential economic infrastructure, and to minimise and address adverse humanitarian consequences”.

110. The main tasks of the Coalition were identified as:

- overcoming the resistance of Iraqi Security Forces;
- denying the Iraqi regime the use of WMD now and in the future;
- removing the Iraqi regime, given its clear and unyielding refusal to comply with the UN Security Council’s demands;
- identifying and securing the sites where WMD and their means of delivery were located;
- securing essential economic infrastructure, including for utilities and transport, from sabotage and wilful destruction by Iraq; and
- deterring wider conflict both inside Iraq and in the region.

111. The campaign objectives also included “immediate military priorities” in the wake of hostilities. Those were to:

- provide for the security of friendly forces;
- contribute to the creation of a secure environment so that normal life could be restored;
- work in support of humanitarian organisations to mitigate the consequences of the conflict, or provide relief directly where needed;
- work with the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to rid Iraq of its WMD;
- facilitate remedial action where environmental damage had occurred;
- enable “the reconstruction and re-commissioning of essential infrastructure for the political and economic development of Iraq, and the immediate benefit of the Iraqi people”; and
- lay plans for reforming the Iraqi Security Forces.

112. The document said that “British military forces will withdraw as soon as practicable”, and concluded by re-stating the end state for Iraq set out by Mr Straw in his statement of 7 February.

113. Royal Marines from 3 Commando Brigade landed on the al-Faw Peninsula early on 21 March.

114. On 20 March, the deployment of UK 3 Commando Brigade was brought forward from the evening of 21 March to 1900 on 20 March.⁶⁷

115. Royal Marines of 40 and 42 Commando launched assaults on the al-Faw Peninsula during the night of 20/21 March.⁶⁸

116. Marines from 40 Commando were reported to be ashore on the al-Faw Peninsula on the morning of 21 March.⁶⁹

117. The landings by the Royal Marines did not go entirely as planned.

118. The risk that the beaches would be mined was not explicitly identified and addressed, and does not seem to have been drawn to the attention of Mr Hoon.

119. As Chief of the Defence Staff, that was Adm Boyce's responsibility.

120. The crash of a US helicopter carrying US and UK personnel in Kuwait resulted in a temporary suspension of US Sea Knight flights, as weather conditions worsened, delaying the deployment from 42 Commando by around six hours.⁷⁰ The crash killed four US aircrew and eight UK personnel.⁷¹

121. The MOD's *Lessons for the Future* report stated that, despite efforts "against the clock" to clear a beach for landing the light armour, the risk was deemed to be too high when the scale of mining became apparent. The vehicles had to be landed back in Kuwait and eventually reached their positions "some 24 hours later".⁷²

122. Lieutenant General Sir James Dutton, who commanded 3 Commando Brigade from July 2002, told the Inquiry that the landings had not entirely gone to plan.⁷³ A decision had been made to abort the planned US hovercraft landing of the brigade's light, tracked armoured vehicles because the risk was considered to be too great. The helicopter crash had delayed the arrival of 42 Commando by "about 10 to 12 hours".

123. The overnight report for 20/21 March prepared by staff in COBR for No.10 recorded: "Overall, Coalition Forces have met slightly more resistance than anticipated, and there is no evidence yet of widespread Iraqi capitulation."⁷⁴

124. Gen Reith told the Inquiry that intelligence had "lost sight of the Special Republican Guard" about two weeks before the invasion and that it later "transpired that they had been broken down into small elements and placed within various brigades".⁷⁵

⁶⁷ Letter Watkins to Manning, 20 March 2003, 'Iraq: Military Action'.

⁶⁸ House of Commons Library, Research Paper 03/50, 23 May 2003, 'The Conflict in Iraq'.

⁶⁹ Minutes, 21 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁷⁰ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

⁷¹ Major Jason Ward, Captain Philip Guy, Warrant Officer Mark Stratford, Colour Sergeant John Cecil, Sergeant Les Hehir, Lance Bombardier Llywelyn Evans, Operator Mechanic (Communications) Ian Seymour, Marine Sholto Hedenskog.

⁷² Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

⁷³ Public hearing, 12 July 2010, pages 14-15.

⁷⁴ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Manning, 21 March 2003, 'Iraq: Overnight Sitrep'.

⁷⁵ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, page 55.

125. Gen Reith added that that had not really been a factor other than for 3 Commando Brigade which had:

“... hit a couple of small pockets of resistance which were Special Republican Guard.

“By and large ... we were dealing with ... conventional divisions ... many of them just broke up and disappeared.”

126. The redeployment of elements of the Republican Guard to stiffen Iraqi defences in the South had not been predicted by the JIC.

127. The assessments made pre-conflict about the conventional capabilities of Iraq's Security Forces and their actions and intentions in response to an invasion are set out in Section 6.2.

128. The assessment of the operational risks from forces deployed in the South is set out in the Box below.

Potential Iraqi opposition in southern Iraq

A JIC Assessment of 6 December 2002 considered Iraq's options “during a coalition ground attack”.⁷⁶ The Assessment described Iraq's naval capability as “very limited”, but said that it “could lay a credible minefield along the Iraqi coast”. It did not specifically address Iraq's potential response to an amphibious assault, including mining the beaches.

The campaign plan for Operation Desert Storm in 1991 did not involve amphibious landings.⁷⁷

The advice to Mr Hoon and Mr Blair is set out in Section 6.1.

The MOD advice to Mr Hoon in December 2002 identified a potential threat to maritime forces from Iraqi forces defending the al-Faw Peninsula, and stated that the US plan was designed to prevent reinforcements being attempted. If reinforcement was attempted, “Coalition Forces should be able to defeat it with ease”.⁷⁸ There was no consideration of the likelihood of Iraq mining the beaches to hamper an amphibious landing.

Sir Kevin Tebbit, MOD Permanent Under Secretary, identified the need for an assessment which set out the operational risks of the role proposed for the Royal Marine Commando Group in a clear and balanced way.⁷⁹

The papers sent to No.10 by the MOD on 12 December did not address likely Iraqi defences.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ [JIC Assessment, 6 December 2002, 'Iraq: Military Options'](#).

⁷⁷ Ministry of Defence, *Statement on the Defence Estimates – Britain's Defence for the 90s*, 1991, Cm 1559-I. Pages 21-24.

⁷⁸ [Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 11 December 2002, 'Iraq Military Planning: Amphibious Task Group'](#).

⁷⁹ [Manuscript comment Tebbit on Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 11 December 2002, 'Iraq Military Planning: Amphibious Task Group'](#).

⁸⁰ [Letter Williams to Manning, 12 December 2002, 'Iraq: Military Planning – Amphibious Task Group \(ATG\)'](#).

A JIC Assessment of 29 January 2003 reported “continuing military defensive preparations, including deployments and reinforcements of military units in the South, West and along the border of the Kurdish autonomous zone” which appeared to be “directed against both the threat of internal uprising and external attack”.⁸¹ That included “possibly 1,000 troops on the al-Faw Peninsula, apparently in response to the Coalition build-up in Kuwait”. But Iraq’s options for redeployment in the South were “limited”: “Any significant redeployment in the South would risk triggering a Coalition attack by breaching the No-Drive Zone.”

On 19 February, the JIC assessed the situation in southern Iraq and what might happen there before, during and after Coalition action.⁸² The JIC judged that:

“The Iraqi forces currently guarding southern Iraq are a relatively weak first line of conventional defence. They face rapid defeat. There is little evidence so far that the Iraqis are preparing for a hard-fought defence of Basra and other urban areas.”

The Assessment stated:

- Resolution 949 (1994) (see Section 1.1) prohibited the presence of the Republican Guard in the South. Its absence and the weaknesses of the Regular Army meant that the Iraqi forces guarding southern Iraq (III and IV Corps) were a relatively weak first line of conventional defence which would “face rapid defeat in the face of a massive military onslaught”.
- The JIC knew “little about Iraqi plans for the defence of Basra”, but there was “as yet no sign of preparations for a hard-fought defence of this or other urban centres in southern Iraq”.
- Saddam Hussein’s regime had “appointed his cousin Ali Hassan al-Majid [Chemical Ali] as regional commander of the southern sector ... with authority over all forces in the area. Iraq practice in the Iran/Iraq war suggests this would include tactical control over CBW. Ali is a loyal member of Saddam’s inner circle. He was a brutal Governor of occupied Kuwait in 1990–91. He also played a leading role in suppressing the Shia uprising in 1991 and Kurdish rebels in the late 1980s (using chemical weapons against the Kurds). His appointment may reflect an Iraqi leadership view that a particularly loyal and ruthless figure is needed to take command in the South in a crisis, both to suppress the Shia and to maintain discipline among the Iraqi forces.”

Southern Iraq was judged to be the most likely area for the first use of CBW against Coalition Forces and the local population (see Section 4.3).

129. The assessment of the risks posed by irregular forces is addressed later in this Section.

130. In a statement on 21 March, Mr Hoon reported on the operations overnight, including the loss of UK personnel and the Royal Marine operations supported by Royal Navy ships.⁸³ He expected the port of Umm Qasr “to be fully under coalition control shortly”.

⁸¹ [JIC Assessment, 29 January 2003, ‘Iraq: The Emerging View from Baghdad’.](#)

⁸² [JIC Assessment, 19 February 2003, ‘Southern Iraq: What’s In Store?’](#)

⁸³ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 21 March 2003, columns 1209-1210.

131. Mr Hoon also reported that the 5th US Marine Corps Regimental Combat Team (RCT-5) had launched operations to secure the south Rumaylah oilfield and gas and oil platforms in southern Iraq at 1715 hours on 20 March. The main land offensive had begun at 0300 hours on 21 March. Two battlegroups of 7 Armoured Brigade (the Black Watch and 1st Battalion Royal Regiment of Fusiliers) were providing flank protection for US forces. “Stiff resistance” had been encountered.

132. RCT-5 was supported by specialist UK Explosive Ordnance Disposal and Specialist Team Royal Engineers personnel.⁸⁴

133. RAF aircraft, including the Tornado GR4 and Harrier GR7, flew a number of combat and combat support missions in support of the operations, striking targets as far north as al-Kut.⁸⁵

134. The 3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery, located on Bubiyan Island (several miles south-east of Umm Qasr), plus HMS Marlborough, HMS Richmond and HMS Chatham, provided artillery support to the operations.⁸⁶

135. HMS Chatham later contributed to information operations by broadcasting pre-recorded material on high frequency radio.⁸⁷

136. In a press conference on 21 March, Adm Boyce described the US 3rd Infantry Division as having “penetrated more than 140km into Iraq”.⁸⁸

137. In an update to the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 21 March on the intelligence picture, Mr Scarlett referred to the possible deployment of chemical weapons to units in the South and the possibility of internecine fighting in southern Iraq.⁸⁹

138. Adm Boyce reported that most of the oil wells in southern Iraq had been secured with minimal damage.

139. Mr Blair and President Bush discussed campaign progress on 21 March, including the scale of desertions from Regular Army units and the possibility of inter-ethnic strife in cities in the South.⁹⁰ Mr Blair wondered how the Coalition would know when the regime had definitively collapsed.

140. The overnight report to No.10 on 22 March, recorded that 16 Air Assault Brigade had relieved US forces in the Rumaylah oilfields and 7 Armoured Brigade had relieved

⁸⁴ Briefing [MOD], 1 April 2003, ‘Annex to Evening Sitrep’.

⁸⁵ GlobalSecurity.org, 21 March 2003, *Defence Secretary and Chief of the Defence Staff: Press Conference at the Ministry of Defence, London – 21 March 2003*.

⁸⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

⁸⁷ Minutes, 22 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁸⁸ GlobalSecurity.org, 21 March 2003, *Defence Secretary and Chief of the Defence Staff: Press Conference at the Ministry of Defence, London – 21 March 2003*.

⁸⁹ Minutes, 21 March 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

⁹⁰ Letter Cannon to McDonald 21 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Prime Minister’s conversation with Bush, 21 March’.

US forces south of Basra.⁹¹ The commander of Iraq's 51st Mechanised Infantry Division had surrendered and the southern oilfields and the oil infrastructure on the al-Faw Peninsula had been secured.

141. The 51st Mechanised Infantry Division had been located in the vicinity of the az-Zubayr oil pumping station several miles south-west of Basra.⁹²

142. Mr Scarlett informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 22 March that there was evidence of Iraqi Army divisions being prepared to surrender at Basra and Nasiriyah.⁹³

143. Adm Boyce also reported to the meeting that the oilfields and platforms in the South had been prepared for demolition by the Iraqis.

144. The minutes of the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 22 March recorded that 1 MEF was in full control of the Rumaylah oilfields and that UK engineers were making safe the demolition charges and booby traps which had been found in many of the facilities.⁹⁴ Seven oil wells were reported to be on fire, and two leaking. There were also reports that regular units of the Iraq Army had moved out of Basra.

145. The Chiefs of Staff were also informed that Coalition Forces had seized crossings of the Euphrates, the Tallil airfield and the az-Zubayr oil pumping station.

146. Mr Blair and President Bush spoke again on 22 March.⁹⁵ Their review of military developments included:

- an assessment that the campaign was ahead of objectives;
- surrenders were taking place on a massive scale in the South;
- many more Iraqis were deserting from the Iraqi Security Forces and melting back into the civilian population;
- US forces were looking hard for traces of WMD and had already destroyed some "WMD-type" manufacturing facilities; and
- the need to ensure that Syria realised that it should not hide Iraqi WMD or harbour regime fugitives.

147. Mr Blair said that it would be important to locate WMD manufacturing facilities. He and President Bush agreed to speak on 24 March to discuss how to deal with operations in Baghdad itself.

148. AM BurrIDGE wrote in his 8 May end of tour report that the decision to launch the ground offensive before the start of the strategic air campaign, and in the process

⁹¹ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Manning, 22 March 2003, 'Iraq: Overnight Sitrep'.

⁹² [Letter Watkins to Manning, 11 March 2003, 'Iraq: The Military Plan'](#).

⁹³ Minutes, 22 March 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

⁹⁴ Minutes, 22 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

⁹⁵ Minute Cannon to McDonald, 22 March 2003, 'Iraq: Prime Minister's conversation with Bush, 22 March: Military Developments'.

prevent Saddam Hussein from successfully sabotaging Iraq's oil infrastructure, "may have been the seminal decision of the campaign".⁹⁶ Environmental damage had been minimised, and the revenue source that would be vital to Iraq's future prosperity had been largely protected.

The air campaign

149. The "Shock and Awe" strategic air campaign was launched, as planned, on 21 March.⁹⁷ It involved heavy bombing of Baghdad. Targets in and around Mosul, Tikrit and Kirkuk were also attacked.

150. A letter from the MOD to No.10 on 23 March reported that: "As of 1100Z today UK tactical air and TLAM had attacked 115 strategic targets."⁹⁸

151. By 24 March, the main focus of Coalition air activity had shifted from strikes against fixed targets to support of land operations including Close Air Support (CAS).⁹⁹ That remained the priority for the duration of combat operations.

152. For the duration of the campaign, the RAF was tasked as a Coalition asset, providing support to all Coalition nations. By early April, the RAF was flying about 10 percent of the 1,200 sorties being flown per day by the Coalition.¹⁰⁰

153. In July 2003, the MOD assessed that the RAF had flown almost 2,500 sorties, 6 percent of the Coalition total.¹⁰¹

154. The guidance provided on targeting is addressed in Section 6.2.

Battle Damage Assessments

A Battle Damage Assessment (BDA) is made after an attack to assess its impact and effectiveness, including estimates of "collateral damage" – the damage to facilities and the death or injury of people in the vicinity of the target.

As Section 6.2 shows, the risk of collateral damage was an important consideration on selecting and approving targets for attack by the UK.

The Chiefs of Staff were advised on 28 March that:

"The Battle Damage Assessment (BDA) process was not providing sufficient verification of the damage done to Iraqi military units; work was in hand to improve the capability."¹⁰²

⁹⁶ Report Burrridge to CJO, 8 May 2003, 'NCC Operation TELIC Hauldown Report'.

⁹⁷ Briefing MOD, 22 March 2003, 'Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep, 0600Z 22 March 2003'.

⁹⁸ Letter Watkins to Manning, 23 March 2003, 'Iraq: Progress of Military Campaign'.

⁹⁹ Briefing [MOD], 24 March 2003, 'Annex to evening sitrep, 24 March: Military'.

¹⁰⁰ GlobalSecurity.org, 4 April 2003, *Minister of State for the Armed Forces and the Chief of the Air Staff: Press Conference at the Ministry of Defence, London – 4 April 2003*.

¹⁰¹ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq – First Reflections*, July 2003.

¹⁰² Minutes, 28 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

The Inquiry has seen papers that indicate a review of the 'Joint Targeting and Battle Damage Assessment' policy paper was carried out in late April 2003, with the aim of highlighting any differences between the theory of targeting and the realities of an operation.¹⁰³ Two main issues were identified: the ability to provide accurate and timely BDAs and the difficulty in target clearance where UK strategic aims did not agree totally with US strategic aims.

In his post-operation tour report, Major General Peter Wall, Chief of Staff to AM Burrige during the invasion and subsequently Commander 1 (UK) Div, wrote:

"The conduct and co-ordination of BDA was poorly done throughout the operation. BDA analysis from MEF [the US Marine Expeditionary Force] was at best 5 days too late. Immediate BDA from pilots gave a general idea but was, invariably, inaccurate. This meant that targets were re-engaged unnecessarily on many occasions, denying assets elsewhere."¹⁰⁴

In its report of lessons from the conflict, the MOD Directorate of Operational Capability (DOC) identified that the different models and methods used by the US and UK to estimate collateral damage had resulted in a divergence of policy which had produced friction.¹⁰⁵ It concluded that the UK needed to develop its policy to seek greater coherence with the policies of potential allies, particularly the US. It also recommended that improved tools were required for the assessment of collateral damage to enable rapid decisions; and that compatibility with US systems should be a consideration. The Coalition BDA process had not been able to cope with the scale of the task and the UK's capacity needed to be reviewed to ensure it matched the needs of a national operation. In addition, it was based on damage not effect. That too should be reviewed for compatibility with the concept of effects-based targeting.

Asked if there were any areas of improvement he would suggest, ACM Torpy told the Inquiry:

"The only area which I think we could have done more with, and that is the mechanisms by which we assessed collateral damage. One of my roles I saw was making sure that our targeting process was aligned as closely as possible with the US system, but where there were inevitably going to be differences, that I sorted those out with Gen Moseley before the campaign started, and we tried to find a mechanism for solving those problems. One of the issues was if the US use a particular software system for working out collateral damage and we use a different one that it comes out with slightly different answers. Ours is slightly more conservative. I think more work in trying to align some of that methodology would have been helpful."¹⁰⁶

The maritime campaign

155. AM Burrige described the UK mine countermeasures group as the "backbone" of the Coalition's mine clearance capability.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Minute MOD [junior official], 23 April 2003, 'Review of the Joint Targeting and Battle Damage Assessment Policy Paper'.

¹⁰⁴ Report Wall, 6 October 2003, 'Post Operation Report – Version 2 Operation TELIC'.

¹⁰⁵ Report Directorate of Operational Capability [MOD], 17 October 2003, 'Operation TELIC Lessons Study'.

¹⁰⁶ Public hearing, 18 January 2011, page 13.

¹⁰⁷ Report Burrige to CJO, 8 May 2003, 'NCC Operation TELIC Hauldown Report'.

156. The Royal Navy commenced mine clearance operations and seized some Iraqi ships ready to lay mines on 21 March.¹⁰⁸

157. On 22 March, the MOD reported to No.10 that the Iraqi Navy had been “destroyed”.¹⁰⁹

158. On 23 March, the Royal Navy began operations to clear the Khawr Abd Allah (KAA) waterway of mines so that the port of Umm Qasr could be opened to shipping.¹¹⁰ Opening Umm Qasr was essential for the rapid delivery of humanitarian aid and logistic support for the military campaign.

159. The Royal Navy also used its submarine-launched TLAM to provide “a long-range, precision capability”. In December 2003, the MOD stated that a “substantial” number of TLAMs had been launched from UK submarines.

23 and 24 March: UK forces reach Basra

160. By 24 March, UK forces were in control of Basra Airport and “arrayed around” the “outskirts” of Basra City.

161. When and how to enter the city in the face of a “heavy presence of internal security forces” was identified as a key decision.

162. By the early hours of 23 March, 3 Commando Brigade had taken control of Umm Qasr, and was planning to “expand influence out from al-Faw and Umm Qasr”.¹¹¹ The MOD morning update for No.10 also stated that 7 Armoured Brigade was “expected to enter Basra on D+4 [23 March]”.

163. Mr Hoon informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 23 March that:

“Iraqi regular forces were melting away but it remained to be seen if the Republican Guard would stand and fight. The emergence of militia forces who were prepared to fight [because] they had nothing to lose ... was a new difficulty for the Coalition in securing the centres of population.”¹¹²

164. A report based on the Chiefs of Staff discussion on 23 March, sent to Sir David Manning, stated that reconnaissance of Basra was being conducted and: “A decision will then be taken whether to enter the city tonight or whether to hold off until tomorrow evening.”¹¹³

¹⁰⁸ GlobalSecurity.org, 4 April 2003, *Defence Secretary and Chief of the Defence Staff: Press Conference at the Ministry of Defence, London – 21 March 2003*.

¹⁰⁹ Briefing [MOD], 22 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep, 0600Z 22 March 2003’.

¹¹⁰ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

¹¹¹ Briefing [MOD], 23 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep, 0600Z 23 March 2003’.

¹¹² Minutes, 23 March 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

¹¹³ Minute Gibbons to Manning, 23 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Update Sunday 23 March (1100)’.

165. The report also stated:

“The situation surrounding Iraq’s 51st Mechanised Infantry Division remains confused. A lot of its equipment has been abandoned and its personnel have vanished. In the South, UK and US are meeting small pockets of resistance ... and some seems to be local militia ... But this could indicate that Coalition Forces are likely to be the subject of harassment and sabotage for some time to come!”

166. In relation to the wider campaign, the report said:

“Tommy Franks intends to maintain (and if possible increase) the momentum of the push towards Baghdad. At present leading elements of the US V Corps are just south of Najaf ... The focus of air activity is now on counter-land operations against SRG [Special Republican Guard] and RG [Republican Guard], although command and control, WMD and regime HQs are also being targeted.”

167. A letter from Mr Watkins to Sir David Manning on the same day, forwarding an initial assessment of progress against the main military campaign objectives, recorded that the military campaign was “broadly proceeding to plan”, with pockets of resistance but “no signs of internal uprisings”.¹¹⁴

168. The MOD update that evening stated that 7 Armoured Brigade was “arrayed around [the] outskirts of Basra ... Will not be in Basra tonight, as previously thought.”¹¹⁵

169. The COBR overnight report for 23/24 March stated:

“Reporting from Basra suggests the heavy presence of internal security forces from the Saddam Fedayeen, the DGI [Directorate of General Intelligence] and the Ba’ath Party militia ... Key (UK) decision now concerns when and how to enter the city [Basra].”¹¹⁶

170. Adm Boyce told the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 24 March that local militias in Basra were putting up resistance and 1 (UK) Div would proceed with caution in taking control there.¹¹⁷

171. Mr Hoon stated that the Iraqis would try to draw the Coalition into the cities, where fighting would be difficult. The next 24 hours would show whether the Republican Guard intended to try to bar the Coalition’s advance on Baghdad.

172. The meeting also discussed media reporting, which had started to play up the difficulties of the military campaign, and its impact on local politics: “Expectations had been created and would now need to be managed if they were unrealistic.”

¹¹⁴ Letter Watkins to Manning, 23 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Progress of Military Campaign’.

¹¹⁵ Briefing [MOD], 23 March 2003, ‘Annex to Evening Sitrep 23 March: Military’.

¹¹⁶ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Manning, 23/24 March 2003, ‘Iraq: COBR Overnight Sitrep’.

¹¹⁷ Minutes, 24 March 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

173. Mr Blair concluded that militia resistance in population centres did not appear significant when set against the broad thrust of the campaign and the Coalition's achievements to date. The campaign was only 72 hours old and there was no case for adjusting the presentational posture before it was known what pattern was developing on the ground.

174. By 24 March, UK forces controlled Basra Airport.¹¹⁸

175. In preparation for a statement to Parliament by Mr Blair on 24 March, Mr Blair's Assistant Private Secretary provided a "note on military developments" which said:

"Pockets of resistance remain in the cities, particularly from hard-core regime supporters ... [The] city of Basra is surrounded, with airport in Coalition hands (but significant resistance from hard-core regime supporters expected ...)." ¹¹⁹

176. In his statement, Mr Blair re-stated the UK's "central objectives" as "to remove Saddam Hussein from power" and ensure that Iraq was disarmed.¹²⁰ The military campaign to achieve those objectives was being conducted deliberately in a way that "minimises the suffering of ordinary Iraqi people" and "to safeguard the wealth of the country for the future prosperity of the people". That was why the Coalition had not mounted a heavy bombing campaign before the land campaign, and why the immediate actions of the land forces had been to secure oil installations, which had been mined. Had the Coalition not "struck quickly, Iraq's future wealth would even now be burning away".

177. Mr Blair said that the targets of the air campaign were the "infrastructure, command and control of Saddam's regime, not of the civilian population". Water and electricity supplies were "being spared" and there were "massive efforts to clear the lines of supply for humanitarian aid", although that was hindered by the presence of mines.

178. In relation to the city of Basra, Mr Blair stated that the aim was to render it "ineffective as a basis [sic] for military operations". The city was "surrounded and cannot be used as an Iraqi base", but there were "pockets of Saddam's most fiercely loyal security services" in Basra who were "holding out". They were "contained but still able to inflict casualties ... so we are proceeding with caution". Basra Airport was "secure".

179. Mr Blair also said that:

- The Coalition objective in the desert in the West was "to prevent Saddam from using it as a base for hostile external aggression".
- In the North, the objective was to "protect people in the Kurdish Autonomous Zone, to secure the northern oilfields and to ensure that the North cannot provide a base for Saddam's resistance".

¹¹⁸ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

¹¹⁹ Minute Cannon to Prime Minister, 24 March 2003, 'Iraq: Military Developments'.

¹²⁰ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 24 March 2003, columns 21-22.

- Reaching Baghdad “as swiftly as possible, thus bringing the end of the regime closer” was “the vital goal”. There were “bound ... to be difficult days ahead, but the strategy and its timing are proceeding according to plan”.

180. On 24 March, Sir David Manning spoke to Dr Rice.¹²¹ She indicated that the appearance of “irregular forces” alongside Iraqi regular forces in Umm Qasr and elsewhere “was proving a tough combination to deal with”.

181. In a reference to the legacy of the previous Gulf Conflict, Sir David also recorded:

“One of the problems was that many people in Iraq were still unsure whether we were determined to complete the job this time. Only when they were certain that we would get rid of Saddam ... would they conclude it was safe to turn on the regime’s henchmen. Ironically the care that we had taken over targeting ... and the decision to leave the broadcasting and communications systems up and running, had probably fed popular doubts about our determination.”

182. Sir David reported Dr Rice as stating that it was not clear if the Iraqi people knew the Coalition was winning.

183. In a discussion with President Bush on 24 March, Mr Blair identified the Fedayeen, the Medina Division of the Republican Guard and the use of Iraqi media and communications facilities for military purposes as the “trickiest issues ahead”.¹²² There was a need to “dampen expectations” and “exercise extreme care” in targeting decisions.

184. Mr Blair also underlined the importance of Coalition Forces finding Saddam Hussein’s WMD.

185. The MOD reported on the evening of 24 March that:

“Major General Brims [is] still considering his options on entering Basra. He intends to move some elements of 3 Commando Brigade (some of Black Watch) into az-Zubayr (town 10 miles south west of Basra) as a test of how city/town fighting might go. This example should help inform decisions on Basra.”¹²³

186. The MOD also reported that the US V Corps had “paused as planned near Najaf”.

187. The COBR report on key events for 24 March stated that the operation as a whole was:

“Just ahead of expected timelines at moment but weather deteriorating.”¹²⁴

¹²¹ Letter Manning to McDonald, 24 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Conversation with Condi Rice’.

¹²² Letter Rycroft to McDonald, 24 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Prime Minister’s telephone conversation with President Bush, 24 February [sic]’.

¹²³ Briefing [MOD], 24 March 2003, ‘Annex to Evening Sitrep 24 March: Military’.

¹²⁴ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Manning, 24 March 2003, ‘Iraq: COBR Round Up of Key Events – 24 March’.

25 to 27 March: an operational pause

188. On 25 March, Mr Blair raised the need for a media campaign to convince the Iraqi people that the regime would collapse with President Bush.

189. Concerns were also emerging about negative press reporting of the progress of the campaign.

190. A debate began about whether the fall of Basra should be given priority as a way to contribute to the fall of the regime in Baghdad.

191. Adm Boyce told the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 25 March that overcoming the resistance of Iraqi irregulars in az-Zubayr would provide a good indication of how Basra should be tackled.¹²⁵ The fall of Basra would send a strong message, particularly when combined with efforts to provide humanitarian relief to its inhabitants. But the bad weather was likely to slow the advance on Baghdad.

192. A minute to Sir David Manning, reporting the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 25 March, stated that the Royal Marines were patrolling Umm Qasr in berets but that:

“Basra remains a conundrum: the commander of 1[UK] Div [Maj Gen Brims] has yet to decide how best to proceed but planning for a number of options continues. Situation should be clarified over the next 24 hours.”¹²⁶

193. The Chiefs of Staff also discussed media issues. The minutes record a view that:

“... reporting from journalists in theatre gave a rather bleak outlook. Consideration would be given to providing military context briefs to the embedded press corps and, separately, to the ‘talking heads’ and opinion formers in London.”¹²⁷

194. After the Chiefs’ discussion, Mr Ian Lee, MOD Director General Operational Policy, wrote to Sir Kevin Tebbit and Adm Boyce, recording that he had pursued three themes identified as:

- the balance in media reporting and the need for a media programme which did not give the appearance that the Government was “rattled”;
- the information operations view of the “Basra/Baghdad relationship”; and
- the “targeting of dual use communication media facilities”.¹²⁸

195. On information operations (IO), Mr Lee stated:

“... we discussed the strategic IO significance of Basra. In sum, the IO advice was that the road to Baghdad leads through Basra. Not only would satisfactory removal of regime elements from Basra send a message to Baghdad, it would have the beneficial side effect (NB not an objective) of pacifying the impatient media.”

¹²⁵ Minutes, 25 March 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

¹²⁶ Minute Gibbons to Manning, 25 March 2003, ‘Iraq: COS Tuesday 25 March’.

¹²⁷ Minutes, 25 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

¹²⁸ [Minute Lee to PS/PUS \[MOD\], PSO/CDS, 25 March 2003, ‘TELIC: Information Campaign’](#).

196. Mr Lee pointed out that the US military took a different view of whether action in Basra would affect the position in Baghdad.

197. Mr Lee advised that a separate submission would address the targeting of communications facilities.

198. A manuscript comment by Sir Kevin Tebbit on Mr Lee's advice said:

“Two points:

- (a) the need to put across the overall strategy and progress towards it, to avoid excessive focus on tactical ‘pinprick’ setback ...
- (b) the importance of ensuring that judgement about Basra v Baghdad ... should be based on military risk/benefit considerations rather than feel under particular political pressure to strike a blow for exemplary humanitarian, or other, reasons.”¹²⁹

199. Mr Hoon's Private Office wrote to Sir David Manning on 25 March stating:

“It is planned to conduct attacks over the next few nights which are intended to degrade Iraqi command and control. These may also have the consequence of stopping some media facilities. It is important that any public statements on these attacks emphasise that it is ‘command and control’ which is being attacked – not ‘propaganda’ facilities.”¹³⁰

200. In preparation for Mr Blair's meeting with President Bush at Camp David from 26 to 27 March, Mr Watkins provided an assessment on 25 March of progress against the campaign tasks.¹³¹ He reported:

“Southern Iraq is effectively under Coalition control although significant resistance remains in Basra.

“7 Armoured Brigade dominates the Basra area and has defeated hard-core resistance in nearby az-Zubayr. Significant irregular forces remain in Basra ... There may be a trade-off between the effort that would be required to defeat them and the need to maintain the tempo of the Coalition's main effort (the push northwards to Baghdad).

“... al-Faw Peninsula, Umm Qasr and the southern oilfields have been secured ... 3 Commando Brigade is in control ... US 15th ... MEF released to return to 1 MEF.

“16 Air Assault Brigade deployed in southern oilfields.”

¹²⁹ [Manuscript comment Tebbit on Minute Lee to PS/PUS \[MOD\], PSO/CDS, 25 March 2003, ‘TELIC: Information Campaign’.](#)

¹³⁰ Letter Williams to Manning, 25 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Targeting’.

¹³¹ Letter Watkins to Rycroft, 25 March 2003, ‘Prime Minister's visit to Washington. Iraq: Review of the military situation’.

201. Mr Watkins sent a second letter later the same day in response to a request from No.10 for advice about “how the Coalition intended to deal with Fedayeen and the Medina Division [of the Republican Guard]”.¹³² The letter said:

“... there are a number of paramilitary or irregular forces operating in Iraq. We do not know for certain which of these forces are putting up resistance in southern Iraq. Reporting from theatre is using the term ‘Fedayeen’ as a generic term for ‘irregular’ resistance.

“... The success or otherwise of groups in Basra is likely to have a direct impact on the way these forces operate in Baghdad ...

“... Against the background of our overall objectives and of the regime’s options, it is tempo – namely rapid advance on Baghdad – that must take priority ... This resistance does not threaten the Coalition’s overall control of southern Iraq or the ultimate attainment of our objectives, but mopping it up is not a trivial task.

“The military handling of this challenge in and around Basra will be a matter for the judgement of ... Major General Robin Brims, and we are keen to not try to second guess him here. At present, his focus is on gathering information on the strength and dispositions of irregular forces within and around the city, whilst testing the water with robust patrolling in nearby az-Zubayr. The outcome of these activities will influence the decision on whether, when and how to confront the residual opposition in Basra. It should be borne in mind that the key military objective is to ‘screen’ Basra, to prevent Iraqi forces disrupting the US push northwards: this is being achieved.”

202. In relation to the Medina Division, the MOD commented that the Iraqi regime could leave it, and other formations, where they were, “making them vulnerable to air strikes and an armoured assault; or withdraw it into Baghdad”. The exact approach to dealing with it would be a “matter for the US land commanders to decide”. The MOD also pointed out that “the engagement of the Medina Division is only a prelude to the key task of dealing with Baghdad itself”.

203. A list of Iraq’s irregular forces and their roles was provided in an annex to Mr Watkin’s letter:

- **The Fedayeen Saddam:** a militia comprising approximately 11,500 active personnel, controlled by Qusai Hussein. In the event of a Coalition attack, it was expected to be used for internal security, including repression of civilian uprisings.
- **The Ba’ath Party militia:** although officially disbanded, the Ba’ath Party was likely to call out members to form an ad hoc force to conduct security sweeps.

¹³² [Letter Watkins to Rycroft, 25 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Irregular forces and the Medina Division’.](#)

- **The Quds Force:** a militia with close links to the Ba'ath Party, resembling a Home Guard. Tasked with defending cities and putting down internal unrest.
- **The Mujahideen e Khalq (MEK):** an Iranian dissident group, used to support internal security operations. Expected to fight with Saddam Hussein's forces during an invasion.
- **The Directorate of General Security (DGS):** a 2,700-strong paramilitary force used for investigating and acting on anti-state activities.
- **The Directorate of General Intelligence (DGI):** a security organisation used to monitor and suppress dissident activities.
- **The Directorate of Military Intelligence (DMI):** a group of military personnel tasked with collecting and assessing military intelligence from abroad and with providing security and counter-intelligence for the Iraqi armed forces.
- **The Special Security Organisation (SSO):** a security service responsible for Saddam Hussein's security, for monitoring the activities and loyalty of other units integral to the survival of the regime and with a key role in protection of CBW assets. Members of the SSO were posted to all Republican Guard and army units, tasked with shooting attempted deserters.

204. Mr Blair spoke to President Bush again on 25 March. They discussed the need to prevent the Fedayeen establishing a foothold and to disrupt the regime's ability to communicate.¹³³

205. Mr Blair commented that progress had been good, but noted the difficulty in persuading the Iraqi public that the regime would in fact collapse and the effects of disinformation such as allegations about the murder of prisoners of war. The Coalition needed to find ways of communicating with the Iraqi public who found it hard to conceive of the Iraqi regime being supplanted. Mr Blair stated that the UK and US did not want to get "sucked into street fighting, where our forces would take casualties". Normalisation efforts, such as the British patrols in Umm Qasr, were significant, as would be the first deliveries of humanitarian aid.

206. Mr Alastair Campbell, Mr Blair's Director of Communications and Strategy, wrote that Mr Blair had told President Bush:

"... there was a chance that the whole thing would collapse quickly like a pack of cards, but we shouldn't bank on it. There would be a lot of fighting, but eventually people would notice change happening ... and if we handled relations with the Iraqi people well, change could come quickly."¹³⁴

¹³³ Letter Cannon to McDonald, 25 March 2003, 'Iraq: Prime Minister's conversation with Bush, 25 March'.

¹³⁴ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

207. In relation to a subsequent presentation and discussion on the military campaign in the MOD, with the Chiefs of Staff and Lt Gen Reith, Mr Campbell added:

“... it was absolutely clear that this was going to be a lot tougher. Reith felt the US had been excessively optimistic about the collapse of the regime. The hard core and Fedayeen were absolutely up for it. TB asked about Baghdad. They said it would be split into forty sectors ... It would take several weeks, and there were lots of dangers ... at Basra ... it was not yet clear the best way to proceed.

“The most important thing for TB was to communicate to the Iraqis that we should see this through, that they would benefit from the fall of Saddam. But we should not expect them to welcome with open arms, because they will find it hard to believe the Saddam era is ending. We were doing OK with public opinion in our own country, but we were nowhere in Iraq. Reith said we had to separate regime from people, and that meant taking out his media ... Back at Number 10, TB was clear that it was going to take longer than anticipated. Shock and awe had not really happened. So we had taken the political hit of a stupid piece of terminology, and then not actually had the military benefits.”

208. The COBR daily report on 25 March related “some concern about the humanitarian situation in Basra where water and electricity supplies have been disrupted since Friday [21 March]”.¹³⁵

209. The draft operational concept for Phase IV operations submitted to the Chiefs of Staff by Lt Gen Reith on 25 March is considered later in this Section.

210. On the evening of 25 March, the MOD reported that:

- “Elements of UK land force continue to test city/town fighting in az-Zubayr as a precursor to decision on tactics with Basra ...”;
- the tactics for the next 12 hours would be to: “Isolate the Iraqi irregular forces from the civilian population in Basra”;
- poor weather was having a significant effect on the campaign: helicopter flights in Southern Iraq had been suspended again because of bad weather, hampering freedom of movement for Coalition Forces;
- 16 Air Assault Brigade remained in Rumaylah, and 3 Commando Brigade on the al-Faw Peninsula;
- the 1st Battalion The Parachute Regiment, an element of 16 Air Assault Brigade, remained on standby for a planned operation to secure Qalat Sikar Air Base (an Iraqi Air Force base in Maysan province) for use in the Coalition logistics chain; to observe any advance of Iraqi forces from the east; and to provide a screen to advancing US forces, postponed due to bad weather; and

¹³⁵ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Manning, 25 March 2003, ‘Iraq: COBR Round Up of Key Events – 25 March’.

- 40 Commando had defeated an Iraqi armoured formation that attacked their position.¹³⁶

211. Looking forward to the next 12 hours, the MOD said that the UK would: “Maintain the Information Operations and media efforts to provide additional motivation for the enemy to capitulate.”

212. The COBR update for the night of 25/26 March said that Coalition aircraft had attacked state TV in Baghdad and the Ba’ath Party HQ in Basra overnight.¹³⁷

213. Mr Scarlett informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 26 March that the situation inside Basra was unclear, although desertions from the Iraqi Regular Army and the militias were on the increase.¹³⁸

214. Adm Boyce said that the operational pause in the main Coalition thrust towards Baghdad, which coincided with the bad weather, would come to an end shortly.

215. At their meeting on 26 March, the Chiefs of Staff were told that the position of Basra continued to attract media attention.¹³⁹ The beginnings of a civil uprising in Basra had been reported, but its extent was unknown. Lt Gen Reith described the situation in the vicinity of Basra as:

“... complex, and further complicated by the possibility that the Land Cdr [Lt Gen McKiernan] might require 7 Arm[oure]d B[riga]de to deploy north to assist in the battle for Baghdad. GOC 1 Div [Maj Gen Brims] assessed that UK forces could not secure Basra without the support of a popular uprising inside the city ...”

216. Adm Boyce directed that: “Ministers would need to be apprised of the difficulties surrounding the Basra issue.”

217. Air Marshal Sir Joe French, the Chief of Defence Intelligence, said that Iraqi TV was back on the air; it continued to play a key role in maintaining regime authority and was instrumental in controlling the population and undermining the Coalition.

218. The Chiefs of Staff discussion about the tension between the UK desire to reduce troop levels and the potential demand for troops for Phase IV and US expectations is addressed later in this Section.

219. On 26 March, Mr Watkins asked Mr Lee for advice on Basra.¹⁴⁰ He wrote:

“Ministers have been informed that the CFLCC would prefer 7 Armoured Brigade not to enter Basra so that it could remain available to reinforce the US advance on

¹³⁶ Briefing [MOD], 25 March 2003 ‘Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep – as at 1700Z 25 March 2003’.

¹³⁷ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Manning, 26 March 2003, ‘Iraq: COBR overnight sitrep – 25/26 March’.

¹³⁸ Minutes, 26 March 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

¹³⁹ Minutes, 26 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

¹⁴⁰ Minute PS/SofS [MOD] to DG Op Pol, 26 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Dealing with Basrah’.

Baghdad. It would be helpful to have a short paper setting out our options ... to act as a framework for discussion at this evening's Ministerial Briefing."

220. Mr Lee replied:

"The military machine is working on a more thorough assessment to this complex question. My own quick and dirty run through of some key points is attached, purely to prompt Ministerial discussion."¹⁴¹

221. Mr Lee pointed out that:

- Baghdad was the CFLCC and Coalition main effort. Reinforcements might be required in Baghdad, but using 7 Armoured Brigade in this role would take time and "risks unattended disaster in Basra".
- 1 (UK) Div had insufficient forces to guarantee success in Basra, and attempting to take Basra by force would divide the Coalition effort.
- Success in Basra would support an information operations "message to Baghdad".

222. Mr Lee did not advocate any particular course of action but stated that the key question was: "When does political/media/humanitarian pressure (primarily on the UK) in Basra reach the point at which it destabilises the Coalition?"

223. A note by Mr Blair in the No.10 files for 26 March indicates his concerns about Iraq.¹⁴² In relation to the military campaign, they were:

"... use airpower more effectively; control Iraq's media; take out communications; show Basra in new hands with popular support; destroy Republican Guards divisions; the strategy for Baghdad."

224. The JIC assessed on 26 March that the Iraqi regime was still in control of urban centres; the prospects for an early collapse of the Iraqi regime had lessened; and the defence of Baghdad could be more determined and professional than predicted.

225. The JIC suggested that a major success, such as breaking the regime's hold over a significant city such as Basra, could have an impact on the perception that the regime was still in control.

226. On 26 March, the JIC discussed the first week of the campaign in Iraq.¹⁴³ Members considered whether the regime believed it could survive and negotiate a settlement, and whether most Iraqis would at least acquiesce to the military action.

¹⁴¹ [Minute DG Op Pol to PS/SofS \[MOD\], 26 March 2003, 'Iraq: Dealing with Basrah'](#).

¹⁴² Note Blair, 26 March 2003, 'Iraq'.

¹⁴³ [Minute Scarlett to Manning, 26 March 2003, 'Iraq: The First Week'](#).

227. Mr Scarlett wrote to Sir David Manning setting out the JIC's conclusions, which included:

- “• regime tactics were always geared towards urban resistance as well as large-scale conventional warfare. The regime has taken heart from its ability, so far, to maintain command control and communications, the lack of a northern front, and the propaganda advantages it derives from domestic (controlled) and international media coverage of the war;
- the regime has not yet been faced with visible Coalition successes which would shake the foundations of its self-belief. The ‘shock’ of Coalition operations on the Iraqis has been limited. Coalition Forces have deliberately bypassed population centres, leaving the regime in control of urban areas. The regime’s command, control and communications have been more resilient than either it or the Coalition expected. The prospects for an early regime collapse have therefore lessened;
- the Iraqi population is reacting cautiously in the face of the regime’s continued security presence and its propaganda. The population fears that the Coalition will not follow through on its initial operation and remove Saddam, leaving it open to regime retribution for popular uprisings. The memory of 1991 is strong ...
- the defence of Baghdad may be more determined and professional than previously thought ...”

228. Mr Scarlett concluded:

“A key question was when the perception would begin to change that the regime was in control. This could follow major success against a key support structure such as the Republican Guard or breaking the regime’s hold over a major city such as Basra ...”

229. In a statement to Parliament on 26 March, Mr Hoon reported that:

“After six days of conflict, the Coalition has made steady progress, following the main outline of our military plan ...”¹⁴⁴

230. Mr Blair raised the impact of liberating Basra in his discussions with President Bush.

231. Mr Blair and Mr Straw met President Bush, Mr Colin Powell, US Secretary of State, and Dr Rice at Camp David from 26 to 27 March.

232. At dinner on 26 March, Mr Blair and President Bush discussed a range of issues including the need to find ways to rebuild relationships after Iraq, to re-engage on a

¹⁴⁴ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 26 March 2003, column 291.

broad international agenda and to tackle the Middle East Peace Plan.¹⁴⁵ Mr Blair gave Mr Bush a note addressing those issues, which is described in Section 9.1.

233. On the military operation in Iraq, Mr Blair emphasised the impact that the liberation of Basra would have. It would “signify that we had broken the power of the paramilitaries, and taken control of Iraq’s second city. This would have enormous resonance”. He did not want to “second-guess the military commanders”, but there were “very strong political attractions in liberating Basra for the signal it would send to the Iraqi people”.

234. Mr Blair also told President Bush that he did not want his visit to Camp David to focus primarily on a UN resolution to deal with post-conflict Iraq: “The time to debate this would come when we had secured victory, and were in a position of strength”.

235. The wider discussion is addressed in Section 9.1.

236. The COBR update sent to Sir David Manning on 27 March reported that a perception of weak Coalition air attacks may have raised regime morale.¹⁴⁶ The update also reported the view of the Defence Intelligence Staff (DIS) that “there is little prospect of a significant uprising [in Basra], until the local population is convinced of the Coalition’s intent and capability to remove the regime”. The Red Crescent was active in Basra. Poor weather in southern Iraq continued to hamper air operations and a number of sorties were cancelled.

237. In preparation for a discussion with colleagues about the significance of Basra for the wider campaign strategy, Mr Hoon was advised that Gen McKiernan’s focus was the fall of Baghdad.

238. In a minute to Mr Hoon’s Private Office on 27 March for a meeting with “Cabinet colleagues” that day, the Deputy Head of Policy/Operations at PJHQ provided advice on the significance of Basra within the wider campaign strategy.¹⁴⁷

239. Mr Hoon was advised that:

“... regime removal is at the heart of the Coalition’s objectives ... The US campaign plan identified Baghdad as the centre of gravity for achieving these, and our other objectives. It has always been McKiernan’s ... understanding that at some stage it would be necessary to take Baghdad, and that the entry of an attacking division into Baghdad would be a strategically decisive point in the campaign. The same cannot be said of any other area (including Basra). Hence it has long been the US plan ... to advance north as rapidly as possible, and reach Baghdad in the shortest possible time (around 12 days, according to Gen Franks ...).”

¹⁴⁵ Letter Manning to McDonald, 28 March 2003, ‘Prime Minister’s Meeting with President Bush at Camp David: Dinner on 26 March’.

¹⁴⁶ Minute Gibbons to Manning, 27 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Update’.

¹⁴⁷ [Minute Dep Hd Pol/Ops\(ME\) to PS/SofS \[MOD\], 27 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Basra – Coalition Campaign Strategy’.](#)

240. The minute reported that the majority of Basra's population were Shia Muslims, and that there was "a potential for the population to rise up against the regime". However:

"We have always recognised that the local population would be wary of rising in this way, given the experience of 1991."

241. The morale of the estimated 6,000 regular forces in Basra was assessed as "low", the morale of the 2,000 irregulars was not; as committed supporters of the regime, they had "everything to lose". Against that background:

"... GOC 1 (UK) Div's [Maj Gen Brims'] intent ... has been to defeat Iraqi forces in the vicinity of Basra and his intent is to continue in this vein; to isolate Iraqi irregular forces from the civilian population ..."

"This approach supports, and reflects, Gen McKiernans' [sic] overall intent. While he doesn't underestimate the importance of Basra, his assessment is that the fall of Baghdad guarantees the fall of Basra, but that the reverse is not likely."

"Fighting in an urban environment is complex, and GOC 1 (UK) Div does not have the forces at his disposal to conduct a successful, opposed entry into Basra ..."

"Other than media reporting, there is no evidence that this approach is contributing to a humanitarian catastrophe in Basra ..."

242. The Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq and Cabinet on 27 March were both chaired by Mr John Prescott, the Deputy Prime Minister, in Mr Blair's absence at Camp David.¹⁴⁸

243. Mr Scarlett informed the Ad Hoc meeting of Iraqi perceptions that the regime's grip on the population still held.

244. Adm Boyce reported that the discovery of mines in the waterway to Umm Qasr would delay the arrival of ships bringing humanitarian relief supplies.

245. Ms Clare Short, the International Development Secretary, reported that the humanitarian situation in Basra was improving because of the efforts of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC). Damage to the high voltage electricity supply by the Coalition had affected the water system. There were lessons to be learned.

246. At the meeting on 27 March, Cabinet paid tribute to the 22 servicemen who had lost their lives in the conflict.¹⁴⁹

247. Mr Hoon informed his colleagues that, against the objectives which had been set out in Parliament, the Coalition had overcome the resistance of Iraqi Security Forces in the South: the al-Faw Peninsula, the port of Umm Qasr and the southern oilfields were

¹⁴⁸ Minutes, 27 March 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

¹⁴⁹ Cabinet Conclusions, 27 March 2003.

all secured. The sooner the oil could flow again, the sooner the profits could be used for the Iraqi people. The Iraqi regime had been successfully denied the use of its WMD. Wider conflict inside Iraq and in the region had been deterred. The leading elements of the US forces were about 60 miles south of Baghdad where they were likely to be opposed by four divisions of the Iraqi Republican Guard. That confrontation would be a crucial event in the military campaign. Baghdad and other centres of population needed to be isolated so that totalitarian control was diminished.

248. The regime’s brutal intimidation was deterring Iraqis from rising up. Nevertheless, Saddam Hussein had lost control of most of southern Iraq. Handling Basra, where there was the potential for a popular uprising although it had so far been held in check by the regime’s militia, could be a model for application in Baghdad.

249. Cabinet also discussed the humanitarian situation and the responsibility of the military as the Occupying Power to provide humanitarian relief. Mr Gordon Brown, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, said that he was making available an additional £120m for humanitarian relief and raising the allocation of funds for the conflict from £1.75bn to £3bn.

250. Later on 27 March, Mr Blair, Mr Straw, President Bush, Secretary Powell and Dr Rice and others at Camp David participated in a video conference with Mr Hoon and Adm Boyce in London and Mr Donald Rumsfeld (US Defense Secretary) and Gen Myers in Washington.¹⁵⁰ Mr Hoon described Basra as “a microcosm of the successes and limitations of Coalition operations across the country”; “regime loyalists” remained in control of key areas, intimidating the urban population.

251. Mr Blair stated that seizing Basra could have a huge impact on the wider campaign.¹⁵¹

252. Adm Boyce had:

“... underlined the strategic dilemma: the fall of Basra would send an important message of the beginnings of the collapse of the Saddam regime, but deploying adequate forces to achieve this in the absence of a local uprising would divert from the top objective of reaching Baghdad. Indeed there was a case for shifting forces from Basra to reinforce the drive on Baghdad.”¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Minute Cannon to Rycroft, 27 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Prime Minister’s video-conference with Bush, 27 March’.

¹⁵¹ Minute PS/SofS [MOD] to DG Op Pol, 27 March 2003, ‘Iraq: VTC with Camp David: 27 March 2003’.

¹⁵² Minute Cannon to Rycroft, 27 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Prime Minister’s video-conference with Bush, 27 March’.

253. Following their meetings, Mr Blair and President Bush gave a joint press conference.¹⁵³ Mr Blair told reporters:

“Our forces are now within 50 miles of Baghdad. They have surrounded Basra, they have secured the key port of Umm Qasr, they have paved the way for humanitarian aid to flow into the country and they have brought real damage on Iraq’s command and control. So we can be confident that the goals we have set ourselves will be met.”

254. Reporting on President Bush and Mr Blair’s press conference and the atmosphere in Washington, the British Embassy commented that the “prospect of instant victory/‘catastrophic success’ has vanished” but President Bush had reassured the American public that victory was the only possible outcome “however long it takes”.¹⁵⁴ That “followed days of media speculation that the war plan was flawed, that the US had too few troops on the ground, that the Iraqi resistance had taken the US by surprise”.

255. The Embassy also commented that managing the media had been “a sharp learning curve” for the US administration and that the press conference had been the first occasion “for [Gen Myers] to articulate at one sitting the gains the Coalition has made into hostile terrain”.

28 March: one week in

256. The MOD was informed that Mr Hoon was keen that the UK did not adopt a “static approach” to Basra and that opportunities were actively exploited.

257. Mr Hoon also asked for advice on the options if the attack on Baghdad was delayed.

258. The MOD overnight situation report on 28 March reported that the radio station at az-Zubayar had been seized. It was not operational but would be repaired for possible future use.¹⁵⁵ The operation at Qalat Sikar had been cancelled.

259. Mr Hoon informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 28 March that he had written to selected Defence Ministers asking them to consider a military contribution to the post-conflict phase.¹⁵⁶

260. Following the meeting, Mr Watkins recorded that Mr Blair had commissioned “an assessment of the US view of the strategic importance of taking Basra” for discussion at the following day’s meeting.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵³ The National Archives, 28 March 2003, *Joint press conference with President Bush at Camp David [27/03/2003]*.

¹⁵⁴ Telegram 416 Washington to FCO London, 29 March 2003, ‘Iraq: The First Week’.

¹⁵⁵ Briefing [MOD], ‘Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep – As at 0600Z 28 March 2003’.

¹⁵⁶ Minutes, 28 March 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

¹⁵⁷ Minute Watkins to Lee, 28 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Basra’.

261. Mr Hoon’s Assistant Private Secretary wrote on 28 March that Mr Hoon had “noted” the advice from the PJHQ about the planning for Basra “and the continuing imperative attached to operations in respect of Baghdad”.¹⁵⁸ He was:

“... keen that we do not adopt a static approach to Basra, but instead actively exploit the physical and information opportunities which are presented ...

“Mr Hoon also wonders whether the balance would be changed if circumstances dictated that the attack on Baghdad were delayed, say until after the arrival of 4th Infantry Division.”

262. The Assistant Private Secretary also requested further advice for Mr Hoon on the actions being taken by UK forces around Basra.

263. Operations around Basra were discussed at the Chiefs of Staff meeting on the morning of 28 March.¹⁵⁹ An air strike had been carried out on the Iraqi Intelligence HQ in Basra. Separately, troops from the Black Watch had conducted a patrol 7km into Basra. Operations were focused on “driving a wedge between the Iraqi forces and the wavering civilian population”.

264. The Chiefs of Staff were told that:

- 16 Air Assault Brigade had been dispatched to secure Route 6, which ran north from Basra, through al-Amara and al-Kut, to Baghdad.
- The al-Faw Peninsula was “thought to be as secure as possible ... Operations had therefore transitioned to PSO – [peace support operations] type activity, although the local population remained very cautious.”
- 3 Commando Brigade continued to destroy enemy assets on the peninsula. CENTCOM guidance had been changed “to include destruction of Regime loyalists and symbols ... to demonstrate commitment to the Iraqi people ...”

265. The MOD sought to counter the media focus on the perceived problems of the campaign.

266. Speaking to the press on 28 March, Lieutenant General William Wallace, Commander of US V Corps, said that it was beginning to look as if the removal of the Iraqi Government was likely to take longer than originally thought.¹⁶⁰ Lt Gen Wallace told reporters:

“The enemy we’re fighting is a bit different than the one we war-gamed against, because of these paramilitary forces ... We knew they were here, but we did not know how they would fight.”

¹⁵⁸ [Minute Williams to PJHQ Dep Hd Pol/Ops\(ME\), 28 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Basrah – Coalition Campaign Strategy’.](#)

¹⁵⁹ Minutes, 28 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

¹⁶⁰ *New York Times*, 28 March 2003, *A Nation at War: In the Field – V Corps Commander: A Gulf Commander Sees a Longer Road.*

267. The *New York Times* reported that bad weather and fierce fighting were slowing the attack, and that the supply train had yet to catch up with the US forces 100 miles from Baghdad, leading to concerns about food, fuel and water.

268. On 28 March, Mr Adam Ingram, the Minister of State for the Armed Forces, and General Sir Mike Jackson, Chief of the General Staff, held their first press conference since the start of military action.¹⁶¹

269. Mr Ingram told reporters that:

“In a remarkably short time the Coalition and the UK presence within it have accomplished an extraordinary amount ... The Iraqis are simply no match for them.”

270. In response to a question about the percentage of the UK Armed Forces committed to operations, Mr Ingram replied that, across all three Services, about a quarter were in the Gulf.

271. In his statement, Gen Jackson responded to reporting that the campaign was “bogged down”, by saying that he “wouldn’t actually describe it that way”. “Bogged down” was, in his view, a “tendentious phrase” for “a pause whilst people get themselves sorted out for what comes next”.

272. Gen Jackson stated that 3 Commando Brigade was in control of the al-Faw Peninsula, 16 Air Assault Brigade continued to secure and control the Rumaylah oilfields, and there had been some “highly successful” engagements around Basra. Iraqi forces in the South were “fixed – by that we mean they are pinned down, their ability to manoeuvre is ... very little indeed”. He also paid tribute to the “staggering achievement” of the logisticians who had made it all possible; that was “better even than what was achieved in the first Gulf War”.

273. Gen Jackson said:

“It is inevitable that there is a demand for rapid results, but we must be very careful that what is hoped ... does not come to some sort of prediction ... it is not a fixed plan ... [as] the President of the United States and our own Prime Minister said yesterday ... it will take as long as it takes to achieve the objective.”

274. Asked about the idea that Iraq’s “dogged resistance” was “ruining” the Coalition’s plan, Gen Jackson stated that the plan had not changed, but the enemy would try to interfere with it. At the tactical level, plans would be adjusted according to the local situation.

¹⁶¹ GlobalSecurity.org, 28 March 2003, *Minister of State for the Armed Forces and the Chief of the General Staff: Press Conference at the Ministry of Defence, London – 28 March 2003*.

275. When Lt Gen Wallace's comments were put to him, Gen Jackson said that the Iraqi irregular forces were regime supporters who were resisting because they had "nowhere else to go, their futures were pretty limited".

276. Reporting on the first week of the campaign, the British Embassy Washington wrote on 29 March that President Bush was "irritated by suggestions that the war plan has gone awry".¹⁶² He was taking steps to manage that by giving "Americans the big picture". As a result, the Embassy noted that the Administration was increasingly willing to "take the gloves off" in its conduct of the campaign.

277. AM Burrige commented in his end of tour report that in the first week the Iraqi regime "had maintained a surprisingly effective hold on media activity, arguably winning the early Information Operations (IO) battle".¹⁶³

278. Lt Gen Brims told the Inquiry that:

"... we did expect irregular forces in their various ways and they probably fought more voluminously and venomously than we had anticipated ..." ¹⁶⁴

279. Lieutenant General Sir Robert Fry, Deputy Chief of Joint Operations (Operations) during the invasion, told the Inquiry that, one week in, UK forces had "found ourselves confronting ... Iraqi conventional forces but also feeling ... enveloped on our own rear areas by Iraqi irregulars ... It represented a dimension that we hadn't expected to find at that stage."¹⁶⁵

280. Mr Hoon told the Inquiry that the speed of advance left rear troops more vulnerable to Fedayeen attack.¹⁶⁶

281. The debate on the next steps of the campaign continued in the UK.

282. At the request of Sir Richard Dearlove, Chief of the Secret Intelligence Service, his Private Office drew Sir David Manning's attention to an account from SIS9 of a meeting between Maj Gen Wall and senior US military officers in CENTCOM which had taken place early on 28 March.¹⁶⁷ Maj Gen Wall had briefed the US "on the UK strategy in Basra". Other points made in the account included:

- The Coalition "needed a victory soon".
- "The battle for Baghdad could not commence with Basra and the South so insecure."
- The US "would ideally need" 7 Armoured Brigade for the attack on Baghdad.

¹⁶² Telegram 416 Washington to FCO London, 29 March 2003, 'Iraq: The First Week'.

¹⁶³ Report Burrige to CJO, 8 May 2003, 'NCC Operation TELIC Hauldown Report'.

¹⁶⁴ Public hearing, 8 December 2009, page 40.

¹⁶⁵ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, page 60.

¹⁶⁶ Public hearing, 19 January 2010, pages 114-5.

¹⁶⁷ Letter PS/C to Manning, 28 March 2003, 'Iraq: Losing the hinterland' with UK document, [undated], 'Iraq: Losing the hinterland'.

- “The major problem was the absence of popular support. What could be done to spark off the popular uprising?”
- “Without public support the conduct of the campaign in particular Phase IV would need to be revised.”
- “... critical assumptions about the nature of the hinterland in which the campaign would be fought are now proving to be mistaken.”
- “The absence of a popular reaction against them [Saddam Hussein’s regime]” was “eroding support for the campaign internationally”.
- Impatience would have risks; the UK needed to hold its nerve.
- The strategy should be to “continue to isolate and destroy regime facilities ... whilst at the same time showing that where we control the ground, life is better”.

283. Sir David Manning sent the report to Mr Blair in preparation for the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 29 March.¹⁶⁸

284. On 28 March, in a brief “intended to provoke thought rather than to provide authoritative assessment”, the DIS Red Team (see Section 6.5) raised the possibility that the Coalition had not fully appreciated the implications of Saddam Hussein’s asymmetric tactics, and specifically:

- urban guerrilla warfare;
- irregular warfare against lines of communication;
- threat of chemical, biological and missile attack; and
- the willingness of the regime to breach international humanitarian law obligations.¹⁶⁹

285. Irregular warfare against the Coalition’s lines of communication had caused delay and casualties, and created the risk of Coalition over-reaction. While the Iraq regime was still in place, Iraqis would “fear the consequences of betraying the regime more than they support Coalition Forces”. That had been “unwittingly supported by the Coalition information campaign, which has encouraged Iraqis to stay at home”.

29 to 31 March: events

286. The MOD update on the morning of 29 March reported that:

“UK forces are not encircling or besieging Basra (contrary to media reports). There are no forces to the east of Basra and routes remain open into the town to allow the flow of civilians and aid.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁸ Manuscript comment Manning on Letter PS/C to Manning, 28 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Losing the Hinterland’ with UK document, [undated], ‘Iraq: Losing the Hinterland’.

¹⁶⁹ Report Defence Intelligence Staff Red Team, 28 March 2003, ‘Saddam’s First Week’.

¹⁷⁰ Minute [MOD], 29 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep – as at 0430Z 29 March 2003’.

287. Adm Boyce informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 29 March that UK forces in the South continued to consolidate their hold.¹⁷¹

288. Mr Hoon said it would be helpful if aid agencies and others could be encouraged to return to the South to distribute aid. That would release troops from the task.

289. There is no reference in the record of the meeting to any discussion of the options for Basra.

290. Just after midday on 29 March, Sir David Manning spoke to Dr Rice, who told him that Gen Franks was preparing for a major battle or “denouement” south of Baghdad.¹⁷² She said that Gen Franks would move when ready, probably within a few days.

291. Sir David and Dr Rice discussed media comments in the US and UK that the campaign was ill-prepared and had become “bogged down”. Sir David said:

“It was worth reminding people that we were only in week two of the war; and that we were dealing with a population that had been traumatised by years of repression and where people were in fear of their lives. When we took control of urban centres, and it became clear that Saddam was really finished, people would be more likely to lose their fear and speak out about Saddam and the horrors they had endured.”

292. The Red Team produced another report on 29 March, again intended to “provoke thought rather than to provide authoritative assessment”, which analysed Saddam Hussein’s likely survival strategy.¹⁷³ It stated:

“We need a focus for our information operations ... the best focus would be Basra under Coalition control, with an effective humanitarian operation in train and plenty of exploitation of recent atrocities. This would have a real impact on his level of international support. This is so critical that the relief of Basra should become the Coalition main effort.”

293. The Chiefs of Staff meeting on 30 March was informed that an attack had been conducted by 1 (UK) Div on the Iraqi Intelligence HQ in Basra overnight on 29/30 March.¹⁷⁴ 7 Armoured Brigade had conducted raids on “opportunity targets” in Basra, “taking advantage of a growing perception that the city was ‘opening up’ to the Coalition”. Radio broadcasts were being transmitted into Basra. Local militia patrols had “significantly reduced”.

294. **In a minute taking stock of the position for Mr Blair, Sir David Manning suggested a review of strategy, including consideration of putting plans for Baghdad on hold and focusing on Basra.**

¹⁷¹ Minutes, 29 March 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

¹⁷² Letter Manning to McDonald, 29 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Conversation with Condi Rice’.

¹⁷³ Minute MOD [junior official] to PS/CDI, 28 March 2003, ‘Iraq Red Team – Saddam’s Survival Strategy’.

¹⁷⁴ Minutes, 30 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

295. On 30 March, Sir David Manning sent a minute to Mr Blair setting out his thoughts 10 days into the conflict, “for what they are worth”.¹⁷⁵ He wrote:

“As you said at Camp David, much has been achieved. We need to keep our nerve. But we also need to accept that the war is not working out as advertised, and adjust accordingly.

“Saddam is apparently still in place; and the Iraqis are fighting effectively. This is not the war the military expected. We need a strategy for dealing with the Fedayeen phenomenon. CDS says Franks will take these units out one by one. But how does he intend to identify them? ... We [the Coalition] are also short of men [...] We now have thousands of troops still on their way through the Red Sea [the US 4th Infantry Division].”

296. Addressing the risks as he saw them, Sir David wrote:

“Franks will launch his delayed and much hyped Army Group offensive later this week. But what sort of offensive will it be if the Iraqis refuse the roles allocated to them ...? Will pulverising attacks be possible on the Medina and Baghdad Divisions if they avoid fighting in massed units in the open, instead concentrating in heavily populated, built up areas?

“Franks’ focus remains Baghdad. Whatever the outcome of the imminent offensive, he [General Franks] seems determined to deliver the prize [Baghdad] to Bush and Rumsfeld within four to six weeks ... The plan to divide Baghdad into forty or fifty sectors and clear them out one by one could turn into a nightmare and give Saddam his Stalingrad. I think you should demand an early review of this strategy. I think it risks losing us the war rather than winning it.”

297. Addressing the military priorities, Sir David advised:

“All this makes me think we should:

- ask the military for a detailed account of how they will now adapt the campaign to the Iraqi guerrilla war of hit and run;
- ask for a detailed analysis of Franks’ planned big offensive ... How severe will collateral damage be if the Medina and Baghdad Divisions are in urban areas?
- put plans for Baghdad on hold, while we focus on Basra. We should reject the argument that if Baghdad falls so will Basra but that the reverse does not apply ... Baghdad is unlikely to fall quickly. But Basra might. Success there would send shock waves through the Iraqi system that could destabilise the regime. This could in turn give us a better chance of taking Baghdad with minimum loss of life. The question is whether it now makes sense for the

¹⁷⁵ [Minute Manning to Prime Minister, 30 March 2003, ‘The Iraq War: Ten Days In’.](#)

Americans to move forces to Basra rather than for us to withdraw our armour from the city and send it north.”

298. Sir David concluded his minute by considering the political strategy. He advised Mr Blair:

“Things may be better than I think [...] But the ‘denouement’ that Condi [Rice] talked to me about yesterday still feels a long way off. We are at a critical moment: we need a ‘Mazar-e-Sharif’ turning point. We need to ensure that the military campaign is the means of winning the political argument. Our best chance is to concentrate on taking Basra in the next few days and weeks, and on pacifying the Shia South. With the oil wells working and humanitarian relief in place, we will be able to show that we have liberated an area and that life is steadily improving. People will then lose their fear and speak out. This will help to transform the media coverage.

“While we concentrate on Basra, we should get more forces into the North as quickly as possible ... Between these southern and northern millstones, we should patiently work against Saddam in Central Iraq. We should move to surround Baghdad, but not move to assault it unless we are very confident that it is ready to fall. Otherwise the military cost will be heavy and the loss of life will be great. Success at this price could well be politically unsustainable.”

299. The MOD continued to advise Mr Hoon that the US military did not see Basra as strategically significant.

300. The US attached a higher priority to the UK role in providing security for the oilfields, protecting lines of communication and in the retention of Umm Qasr.

301. The US military would be unlikely to review the position until after a planned major engagement with Republican Guard forces, which might not take place for several days.

302. UK forces would be continuing raids into Basra and had contingency plans if the situation deteriorated.

303. Mr David Johnson, Head of the MOD Iraq Secretariat, submitted advice on the Coalition campaign strategy for Basra, approved by Adm Boyce, to Mr Hoon’s Private Office on 30 March.¹⁷⁶

304. Mr Johnson wrote:

“US Commanders (Generals Franks and McKiernan)

- Are clear that their main effort is Baghdad, and that they do not have the forces to fight on two fronts at once;

¹⁷⁶ [Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 30 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Basrah – Coalition campaign strategy’.](#)

- Do not see Basra as being of strategic significance;
- Do not believe the fall of Basra would in itself improve the prospects for the fall of Baghdad;
- Judge the main priorities for 1 (UK) Div as being the maintenance of control over the southern oilfields, the security of the lines of communication and the retention of Umm Qasr;
- Would not currently be prepared to provide additional forces for operations to secure entry into Basra; and
- Are unlikely to review their position until after the planned major engagement with Republican Guard forces, which may not take place for several days.”

305. Mr Johnson added that 1 (UK) Div was implementing “a proactive strategy to develop Coalition control over Basra ... conditioned by the need to avoid large UK or civilian casualties”. Iraq was thought to be reinforcing Basra. Progress would be “determined by effects and events rather than a set timetable”. There was “no indication that the US are contemplating any change in strategy”.

306. In the detailed portion of his advice, Mr Johnson stated that US commanders did not see the fall of Basra as “a high operational priority”.

307. The “security of the line of communication – under continual attack from Iraqi irregulars – and the associated preparation of ... front line forces ... the key enablers for the launch of decisive operations against Republican Guard forces, and thereafter Baghdad” were Lt Gen McKiernan’s priorities.

308. The US also did not see Basra as “the main effort for British Forces. They attach a higher priority to the continued security of the southern oilfields, their lines of communication, and to the retention of Umm Qasr.”

309. In relation to the UK’s strategy for Basra, Maj Gen Brims was “continuing with constant, aggressive activity in and around Basra”. His aims were to:

- “divide the Iraqi irregulars from the regime in Baghdad and the civilian population in Basra and az-Zubayr ...
- “encourage any popular uprisings that might enable British forces to enter and take control of the cities, with acceptable risk.”

310. Maj Gen Brims had assessed that:

“... even if he wanted to at this stage – it would be extremely difficult and highly risky to attempt to enter Basra whilst the irregulars remained well organised and while the population are only supporting the Coalition passively at best. To compensate for these factors he would have to resort to attritional tactics relying on heavy firepower. This would guarantee significant casualties – both British and civilians – and widespread damage to infrastructure, both of which could only have a negative impact on domestic and international support, and on Iraqi perceptions of the UK

both in the short term and in the aftermath. Commander 1 (UK) Div is also conscious of the continuing threat posed by Iraqi forces within missile range of Basra ... And most importantly, entry to Basra is a decision for the Coalition land commander, and is not Commander 1 (UK) Div's call."

311. Mr Johnson also set out the specific actions being undertaken by UK forces, including to: "Isolate the community from regime propaganda and replace it with our own information." Radio broadcasts were being used to convey messages, including that:

- "unlike 1991, we will not stop until we have overcome this resistance and overthrown the regime";
- "we will enter Basra when the time is right"; and
- "we will work to relieve the population's hardship when we do enter".

312. Mr Johnson wrote that it was "important to ensure we do not undermine our credibility by making promises we cannot fulfil".

313. Mr Johnson described the raids and attacks at the heart of the UK approach in Basra. They included a raid on the State Security Organisation in az-Zubayr, an air strike on the Intelligence headquarters in Basra and a raid into Basra which attacked the TV station and destroyed two statues of Saddam Hussein. A "further encroachment" into the outskirts of Basra was in progress as Mr Johnson wrote his advice, focused on the Abu Al Khasib area to the southeast of Basra.

314. In the event of "the situation in Basra disintegrating into chaos", Mr Johnson told Mr Hoon that Maj Gen Brims had developed contingency plans. They included leaving a route to the north open "to enable irregular forces to leave – he has troops positioned further north who would engage them at a safe distance from Basra itself – and to forestall accusations that he is laying siege to the city". He was also prepared to facilitate access for the delivery of humanitarian aid and repairs to key infrastructure as necessary; and to deploy 7 Armoured Brigade into the city with tanks.

315. Sir Kevin Tebbit wrote to Mr Hoon on 31 March with "Some personal thoughts about handling the wider [political/military] issues of the campaign."¹⁷⁷

316. In the context of US/UK relations, Sir Kevin cautioned:

"... we need to take some care to avoid a situation where the US is focused on Baghdad and the UK regards the 'exemplar' of Basra as its own contribution. I found David Johnson's note of 30 March instructive in this respect where he reminds us of what US overall strategy is and that 'entry into Basra is a decision for the Coalition Land [Coalition Forces Land Component] Commander, [Lt] Gen McKiernan, and is not Commander 1 (UK) Div's call'. We tend, perhaps because of the way we get our twice daily briefings from PJHQ, to assume that this is a UK lead. We should

¹⁷⁷ [Minute Tebbit to Secretary of State \[MOD\], 31 March 2003, 'Iraq'](#).

not exclude the time or circumstances where it becomes more important to regard Basra as an objective in its own right ... [A]nd I recognise the politics of the issue, particularly if uprisings and humanitarian issues loom larger. But it is a dimension which you might wish to cover with Rumsfeld to ensure that we do not create a perception of drifting apart on the Baghdad/Basra priorities.”

317. Sir Kevin’s comments on Phase IV are covered in Section 10.1.

318. Mr Scarlett reported to the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 31 March that a suicide car bomb at Najaf could be the start of a new aspect of Iraq’s defence, possibly using terrorist organisations from outside Iraq.¹⁷⁸

319. Adm Boyce reported that the British Division was gaining increasing control in the South.

320. Following the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 31 March, a Cabinet Office official told Sir David Manning that:

“There appears to be an increasing doctrinal difference between ourselves and the Americans over our approach to dealing with the Iraqi towns and cities. The Americans are very much in post 9/11 mode for dealing with the undecided: if you are not for us then you must be against us. Our approach has been to seduce ... the undecided and encourage them to rise up. This is a message that we will be trying to get across to the Americans on a variety of levels.”¹⁷⁹

321. The official wrote that in Basra:

“We are now broadcasting into the city. The message has changed from ... ‘stay indoors and sit tight’ to ... ‘get out and liberate yourselves from the regime’.”

322. The Chiefs of Staff discussion of the need for decisions on the UK’s post-conflict responsibilities is addressed later in this Section.

323. During discussion of the military campaign in his conversation with President Bush on 31 March, Mr Blair focused on the need to win the “propaganda war”.

324. Sir David Manning spoke to Dr Rice just after midday on 31 March.¹⁸⁰ Sir David reported that:

“There had been signs over the weekend, in the British sector in the South, that we were beginning to win the confidence of the local population. This would take time and care. But it was the key to unravelling Ba’ath party control. British forces on the edge of Basra were choosing targets carefully and gradually inserting themselves

¹⁷⁸ Minutes, 31 March 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

¹⁷⁹ Minute Gibbons to Manning, 31 March 2003, ‘Iraq: COS Meeting’.

¹⁸⁰ Letter Manning to McDonald, 31 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Conversation with Condi Rice’.

further into the city. We hoped that, in due course, people in Basra would conclude that we really meant to liberate them, and would come over to us.”

325. Dr Rice said that “the Fedayeen phenomenon” had been underestimated, but that Gen Franks was quickly adjusting his tactics in response.

326. In briefing for a discussion between Mr Blair and President Bush at lunchtime on 31 March, Mr Matthew Rycroft, Mr Blair’s Private Secretary for Foreign Affairs, advised that, in relation to the military campaign:

“You said you wanted to cover ... consequences of an incremental approach. Including in the media campaign. Need for strategic grip.”¹⁸¹

327. The discussion between Mr Blair and President Bush recognised that the advance on Baghdad had slowed to give the air campaign more time to “soften up” the Republican Guard.¹⁸² Mr Blair was concerned that the “Basra scenario” could be repeated in Baghdad with a small, pro-regime force in a large built-up area which was “difficult for us to get at without risk of high civilian casualties”. In such circumstances, Mr Blair stated that winning the “propaganda war” would be even more important. Persistent attacks on pro-regime forces coupled with efforts to “win over the locals” would eventually reach a tipping point, but that could take weeks to develop. There was a need to tighten up media handling and drive the news agenda. Mr Blair suggested that, as for the Kosovo campaign, the US and UK “needed an election-style media ‘war-room’”. During the “steady advance” phase, propaganda and politics would be inextricably linked. A clearer picture was needed of the shape of a post-Saddam Hussein Iraq to “sketch out a political and economic future and dispel the myth that we were out to grab Iraq’s oil. But our promises had to be realistic”.

328. Following the discussion, Mr Blair sent President Bush two Notes.

329. Reflecting Mr Blair’s concerns about communications, one Note set out his proposals for a media and communications “War Room” on both sides of the Atlantic to provide a “real sense of strategic grip”.¹⁸³ It would contain eight units able to:

- generate a “big picture message” each day and discourage ad hoc interviews;
- rebut negative stories;
- work up stories which showed the nature of the regime, including trying to free up more intelligence material;
- obtain coverage of Iraqi people helping the Coalition and step up efforts to get messages into Iraq;
- explain what life had been like in Basra pre-invasion and what was being done to improve the situation;

¹⁸¹ Minute Rycroft to Prime Minister, 31 March 2003, ‘Bush Call: Checklist’.

¹⁸² Letter Cannon to McDonald, 31 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Prime Minister’s conversation with Bush, 31 March’.

¹⁸³ Letter Manning to Rice, 31 March 2003, [untitled].

- provide eye-witness accounts of life under Saddam Hussein and the “offer for the future”. That would include a series of political announcements which would set the tone for the post-Saddam Hussein era, such as oil money in a fund administered by the Iraqis and a human rights decree for political, religious and ethnic tolerance;
- improve the work on the Arab media; and
- provide information for European and other non-US/UK outlets.

330. Mr Blair concluded that each of those units would have a discrete task which would need to be brought together to produce a daily briefing.

331. A second Note addressed funding the reconstruction of post-war Iraq (see Sections 9.1 and 10.3).¹⁸⁴

332. Mr Campbell wrote that Mr Blair had discussed the proposals in a meeting with Dr John Reid (Minister without Portfolio), Ms Hilary Armstrong (Chief Whip), Mr Douglas Alexander (Minister of State in the Cabinet Office) and No.10 staff.¹⁸⁵ Mr Campbell had then spent most of the day working out how to put it into practice. He added that he had sensed that President Bush “was maybe sharing” Mr Blair’s “feeling that the military campaign was not quite right. They were both desperate for better communications.”

333. Mr Blair discussed the campaign with Mr Hoon, Adm Boyce and Maj Gen Fry on 31 March.

334. On the afternoon of 31 March, Mr Blair met Mr Hoon, Adm Boyce and Maj Gen Fry, for 80 minutes, to discuss Basra and the wider campaign.¹⁸⁶ At the request of Mr Jonathan Powell, Mr Blair’s Chief of Staff, Mr Rycroft provided a “full note” setting out the dialogue in the meeting.

335. In response to a question from Mr Blair, Maj Gen Fry said that his private estimate was that it would take 10 to 14 days to get to Baghdad, where there were between 5,000 and 6,000 members of the Special Republican Guard.

336. In relation to Basra, Mr Rycroft recorded that Mr Blair had asked: “How long to tipping point?” Adm Boyce had responded: “At least four weeks.”

337. Mr Blair had referred to the “huge strategic importance of Basra” and asked what it would take to “do it quicker”, including whether double the number of troops would help.

338. In response, Maj Gen Fry stated that the “US don’t see the strategic importance of Basra the way you do”, and that the US thought the main role in the South was to hold

¹⁸⁴ Letter Manning to Rice, 31 March 2003, [untitled].

¹⁸⁵ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

¹⁸⁶ [Minute Rycroft to Powell, 31 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Military Briefing’](#).

the oilfields and Umm Qasr and to isolate Basra. He added: “They don’t see the causal linkage between Basra and Baghdad.”

339. In response to a comment from Sir David Manning that Basra was “vital for hearts and minds”, Mr Blair said that “symbolic acts” were important now that the strategy was “steady advance not shock and awe”.

340. In his diary for 31 March, Mr Campbell wrote that “both CDS and C [were] more hopeful” at the morning meetings; and that Mr Blair had seen Adm Boyce “and a general from the campaign” later.¹⁸⁷ Mr Blair had “got more talking direct to the general than he had from weeks of meetings. The truth was that the military and intelligence campaigns had not been wholly successful.”

1 to 3 April

341. Mr Scarlett informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 1 April that the Shia holy sites at Karbala and Najaf could be at risk of attack, with the blame being laid on Coalition Forces to alienate the Shia population.¹⁸⁸

342. Adm Boyce reported that the battle with the Republican Guard south of Baghdad was getting under way. In the South, signs of normality were returning to the towns in British hands. The British Division was conducting both high-intensity operations around Basra itself and post-conflict stabilisation operations elsewhere.

343. Concluding the meeting, Mr Blair said that the Coalition needed to make known its respect for the Shia holy sites and our desire to protect them from any damage by the regime. As regards the overall campaign, there were three phases; it was now in the second phase.

344. Mr Blair said that to sustain support nationally and internationally, there was a need to upgrade the communication strategy; and he had discussed that with President Bush. Better co-ordination across both Whitehall and the Atlantic would be put in place to present a coherent strategy. The nature of the Iraqi regime had to be exposed and the rebuttal system improved. Messages about the future representative government in Iraq and human rights protection had to be conveyed to the Iraqi people and more widely. Resources and the full co-operation of government departments would be needed in providing resources for the communications effort. It was as important to win the diplomatic and political campaign as it was to achieve military success.

345. The progress of the campaign had also been the subject of much debate in Washington.

¹⁸⁷ Campbell A & Hagerty B. *The Alastair Campbell Diaries. Volume 4. The Burden of Power: Countdown to Iraq*. Hutchinson, 2012.

¹⁸⁸ Minutes, 1 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

346. Mr Scarlett informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 2 April that desertions and internecine differences between those opposing the Coalition were on the increase in Basra.¹⁸⁹

347. Adm Boyce reported that Iraqi reinforcement of Basra from the north had been stopped. Photography had been commissioned of Iraqi forces taking cover in and around the Shia holy sites.

348. Concluding the discussion, Mr Blair said that it remained to be seen whether Republican Guard divisions outside Baghdad would fall back into the city or remain outside. UK forces continued to chip away at Basra, where resistance by Iraqi regulars was diminishing. More generally, the main judgement to be made at the end of the conflict would be whether life was better for the Iraqis. This was what would count for Arab opinion in particular. Our message to the Iraqi people needed to be repeated so that there was no doubt about our intentions. Mr Blair repeated that the full co-operation of departments was essential in gearing up the communications effort.

349. Mr Scarlett sent Sir David Manning reports on the situation in Basra and on Iraq's irregular forces on 2 April.

350. The DIS stated that there were indications that the "aggressive posture" of UK forces was undermining the confidence of regime figures in Basra; and that one member of the Iraqi Army had stated that it would attack regime forces once the Coalition moved to take Basra.

351. Mr Scarlett predicted that fighting might continue after the fall of the Iraqi regime and that only the substantial, vigorous and visible presence of Coalition troops could guarantee control.

352. In response to a request from Sir David Manning for regular updates on Basra, Mr Scarlett sent No.10 a DIS report, reviewed and agreed by the Assessments Staff, on 2 April.¹⁹⁰

353. The DIS report stated:

- “• Coalition airstrikes are degrading Ba'ath and security forces grip on the city. The destruction of the Ba'ath headquarters has driven security forces to set up in schools, sports clubs and municipal facilities. Continued airstrikes, combined with UK fighting patrols into the city, are forcing the security forces to disperse ... Reinforcements arrive along Highway 6 – there appears to be large numbers of Fedayeen and possibly Republican Guard travelling in civilian clothes ... The Coalition has left one bridge open in the north and the regime is exploiting this.

¹⁸⁹ Minutes, 2 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

¹⁹⁰ [Minute Scarlett to Manning, 2 April 2003, 'Situation in Basra' attaching Report DIS, 1 April 2003, 'Situation in Basra as at 01 April 2003'](#).

- There are significant numbers of troops still in the city (... estimated over 3,000) as well as tanks ... armoured forces are being destroyed as the regime counter-attacks into the al-Faw Peninsula. The military has attempted to reinforce; however, 16 Air Assault Brigade have destroyed an armoured column (estimated as 17 T-55s ...) moving into the city from the north.
- [...] desertion rates within Basra are assessed to be high. Some members of the RA [Regular Army] have attacked Ba'ath officials [...] UK forces have been approached by a member of the RA who stated that elements of the RA will conduct attacks on regime forces once the Coalition moves to take the city.

Local population

- There is a body of evidence that there may have been an attempted uprising on 25 March. This was put down by the regime, with local tribal leaders summarily executed. Civilians are now too frightened to move against [the] regime. There are multiple reports stating that regime forces have also used mortars and automatic weapons to attack civilians trying to leave the city.
- ... as families leave, elements of the male population seem to be more confident to challenge the regime. As Coalition attacks ... are increasingly successful, anti-regime sentiments are getting stronger.
- There are difficulties with supporting anti-regime forces ... the Coalition will not be able to differentiate between resistance fighters and regime security forces.
- Food and water is in short supply ... UK efforts to assist outside Basra are appreciated, although there have been chaotic scenes.

UK operations within Basra

- [...]
- UK armoured forces have entered the city at night ... There are strong indications that this aggressive posture by UK forces is undermining the confidence of regime figures ...”

354. Mr Scarlett also provided separate and detailed advice for Sir David Manning on Iraq's irregular forces.¹⁹¹

355. The points made by Mr Scarlett included:

- The intelligence was “often unclear or unreliable” about which organisation was involved in particular events, and the “distinction between these organisations” might break down “particularly in confused situations eg currently in Basra, Nasiriyah and Najaf”.
- Before the conflict, each of Iraq's 18 Governorates had had “one Fedayeen battalion and one or two ‘emergency forces’ battalions ... of Ba'ath Party militia and intelligence/security forces (with each battalion up to 1,500 men)”.

¹⁹¹ [Minute Scarlett to Manning, 2 April 2003, 'Iraqi Irregular Forces'](#).

- Estimates of the total strength of the Fedayeen varied from “15–40,000 members”.
- The irregular forces were motivated by a range of factors and they were difficult to identify. They did “not need to be particularly militarily effective to cause the Coalition problems politically or to increase Coalition requirements for force protection”.
- The “survival of communications links with Baghdad and the central Iraqi leadership” was “of pivotal importance to the continued resistance by the irregular forces”; “maintaining the implicit threat of retribution against those who do not fight and undermining any perception of Coalition success”.

356. Mr Scarlett concluded:

“... it remains possible that even without effective command and control ... some irregulars would fight on ...

“Although there is little specific intelligence, we must be ready for new guerrilla-style activity and tactics ... It is possible that Iraq now will have established plans for a ‘stay-behind’ network of fighters and supplies to harass Coalition Forces and the population in areas supposedly cleared of fighters ... The irregulars will also continue to take advantage of any opportunity to infiltrate across the front line into the Coalition rear areas.

“But the key issue will be to what extent the irregulars can intimidate, or are supported by the local population. Only a substantial, active and visible Coalition troop presence can guarantee true control ...”

357. The British Embassy Washington reported on 3 April that the mood swing in the media between 1 and 2 April was like “night and day”.¹⁹² On 1 April there had been blanket coverage of the alleged shortcomings of the military campaign and criticisms from military officers in the Pentagon and the Gulf, which reflected the genuine concerns of some military officers about the inadequacy of current force levels in Iraq and frustration with Secretary Rumsfeld’s style and policies. Some officers believed that Secretary Rumsfeld had deliberately argued for lower forces to show the power of a transformed US military. There were also reports, attributed to UK officers, criticising US tactics. The following day the media were all reporting the new Coalition offensive towards Baghdad, the rescue of a US prisoner of war and the release of three journalists.

358. Adm Boyce reported to the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 3 April that the mood in Basra was turning to the Coalition’s advantage.¹⁹³ Overall, the terror regime was being weakened but Iraqi execution squads were still active. In discussion, the point was

¹⁹² Telegram 437 Washington to FCO, 3 April 2003, ‘Iraq: Update, 1-2 April’.

¹⁹³ Minutes, 3 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

raised that even in places that had been secured by the Coalition in the South, fear of regime reprisals continued to hold sway.

359. Mr Blair concluded that the messages to the Iraqi people about their future should be reinforced. In the South we could demonstrate how life could be improved.

360. Following the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 3 April, Mr Jim Drummond, Assistant Head of the Overseas and Defence Secretariat in the Cabinet Office, advised Sir David Manning that:

“The next two days should tell whether the momentum created by the latest US advance will carry them into Baghdad and/or prompt regime collapse. More likely, the US will attempt to gain a stranglehold and then await reinforcements through the 4th Infantry Division which is now starting to unload in Kuwait. If the latter, the main battle for Baghdad would be fought in May. In the interim, the US would look for the fall of Basra, and some of the other towns which it has bypassed. General Reith, who has just returned from theatre reported that British forces hope to complete the taking of az-Zubayr within the next 48 hours and Basra in the next 2–3 weeks. They are now getting a good flow of information out of Basra and have identified Shia groups who would be willing to take on Saddam’s irregulars.”¹⁹⁴

361. Cabinet on 3 April was informed that:

- **the US advance had been remarkable and it would consolidate its position;**
- **UK forces had taken control of most towns in the region and were “waiting for the right moment” to take over Basra; it could provide a model for dealing with Baghdad; and**
- **progress would be uneven and the Government would need to be steady in its resolve.**

362. At Cabinet, Mr Blair said that the military campaign could best be described in three phases.¹⁹⁵ In the first, Coalition Forces had taken a strategic grip on the country, advancing from the south, preventing Iraqi aggression towards Jordan or Israel in the west and fixing Iraqi forces in the North and East. The second phase was one of steady advance. US forces were advancing beyond Karbala and al-Kut to encircle Baghdad. The UK Division was “chipping away at Basra, taking control of most of the towns in the region and waiting for the right moment to take over Basra itself”.

363. Mr Hoon told his colleagues that the US advance had been remarkable and the leading units were within 15 miles of Baghdad. US forces would consolidate their position as they progressed, bringing in reinforcements. Once Baghdad was isolated, the military question would be how to deal with it.

¹⁹⁴ Minute Drummond to Manning, 3 April 2003, ‘Chiefs Meeting’.

¹⁹⁵ Cabinet Conclusions, 3 April 2003.

364. Mr Hoon suggested that Basra could be a model for the best approach. It was now isolated, with the main access road from the north controlled by Coalition Forces. Inside the city, the regime militia's control by terror was being eroded. Intelligence suggested that the local people's mood was changing as confidence grew that the Coalition would see the job through. Aggressive patrolling would continue to send a message about the Coalition's commitment.

365. Mr Blair stated that the third phase would be the collapse of the regime. The country had been in the grip of a security apparatus which continued to fight for the regime. It appeared that the population at large did not support the regime, but they lacked the confidence to rise up until they could be sure that the change would be permanent. Mr Blair could not forecast how long it would take for the regime to collapse, but only one outcome was possible. Good progress was being made militarily.

366. In discussion, concerns were expressed about the scale of casualties likely to result from urban fighting in Baghdad. Continued pressure for regime collapse was preferable. Protection of the Shia holy sites at Karbala and Najaf was a priority for the Coalition. The UK was publicising reports that the regime intended to damage them and attribute that to the Coalition. Iraqi troops were using schools and hospitals as military positions and, in the South, an ammunition store had been found inside a school.

367. Mr Blair concluded that Cabinet very much appreciated the way UK forces had conducted themselves. Progress was being made on the military, humanitarian and political fronts. The situation was better than could have been expected at that stage. Progress on the ground would nevertheless be uneven and the Government would need to be steady in its resolve. The ultimate judgement on the conflict would be based on whether Iraq was a better place for its people and if the international community regained its unity of purpose.

368. Mr Hoon's statement to the House of Commons conveyed the message that steady progress was being made.

369. In a statement to the House of Commons on 3 April, Mr Hoon said:

"Our strategic grip on Iraq is tightening. In the South, British forces continue to operate in the al-Faw Peninsula, the southern oilfields and the Basra area. The 7 Armoured Brigade is preventing Iraqi forces in Basra from hindering the main advance, while establishing corridors for the safe movement of civilians and humanitarian aid ...

"In the area of Abu Al Khasib, in the south-east outskirts of Basra, 3 Commando Brigade have engaged substantial Iraqi forces, capturing significant numbers of enemy forces, including senior Iraqi officers ... Key suburbs of Basra have now been taken. We will go further into the city at a time of our own choosing ...

“The security situation in a growing number of areas is such that troops are patrolling on foot rather than in armoured cars, and have in some cases been able to exchange their combat helmets for berets.”¹⁹⁶

370. Mr Hoon also stated that the Iraqi regime had suppressed disturbances in Basra on 25 March and opened fire on civilians preparing to leave Basra on 28 March.

4 April

371. Adm Boyce told the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 4 April that UK forces had made a “lodgement” in Basra and continued to apply pressure on the militia, whose ability to maintain control of the city “was diminishing”.¹⁹⁷

372. On the same day, Mr Ingram and Air Chief Marshal Sir Peter Squire, Chief of the Air Staff, gave a press conference at the Ministry of Defence.¹⁹⁸ Mr Ingram told reporters:

“... the Coalition has seen further steady progress both in terms of military advance and in terms of the other crucial battle ... winning the confidence of the Iraqi people through increased normalisation and security.

“... two halves of equal importance and our military campaign objectives reflect this fully.

“... What has been particularly important about the way this campaign has developed is the relationship between these twin objectives ... as the war fighting progresses to a conclusion, we are implementing, at times simultaneously, a security framework for peace.

“... Our approach to the assault on Basra is highly illustrative of this. There is no question that the fire power available ... could be used to a more immediate but destructive effect ... Our restraint should not be interpreted as weakness, rather it is a sign of care ... The city of Basra is contained. Our commanders on the ground will use their own professionalism and sound military judgement to decide when and how to enter the city.”

373. The press conference also addressed the conduct of the air campaign. Mr Ingram stressed the greater focus on precision in that campaign and that “our overriding concern has been to minimise ... civilian casualties and unnecessary casualties on our own side”. Targeting policy had been driven by “a clear moral imperative to minimise civilian casualties. There is of course a legal obligation to do the same ... [and] a practical argument derived from our post-conflict ambitions for Iraq”.

¹⁹⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 3 April 2003, columns 1069-1071.

¹⁹⁷ Minutes, 4 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

¹⁹⁸ GlobalSecurity.org, 4 April 2003, *Minister of State for the Armed Forces and the Chief of the Air Staff: Press Conference at the Ministry of Defence, London – 4 April 2003*.

374. Mr Blair and President Bush discussed the progress of the campaign on 4 April, including the signal sent to the Shia in Baghdad as a result of the Royal Marines' exemplary conduct in Basra. Iraqi forces in Basra could collapse but it was "more likely" that there would be "patient erosion so that the city fell in 10 days or two weeks".¹⁹⁹ Mr Blair pointed out the need to convince the Iraqi population that the regime was "crumbling" and that "we [the Coalition] were not going to leave".

375. The discussion of Phase IV issues is addressed in Sections 9.1 and 10.1.

376. In a letter to the Iraqi people on 4 April, Mr Blair stated that Saddam Hussein would go and that troops would not remain in Iraq "a day longer than necessary".

377. On 4 April, the text of a letter from Mr Blair to the people of Iraq, which was being distributed by UK troops in Iraq, was reported in the media.²⁰⁰ In the letter Mr Blair assured readers that Saddam Hussein would be "gone", and went on to make the following commitments:

"Our troops will leave as soon as they can. They will not stay a day longer than necessary.

"We will make sure deliveries of vital aid such as food, medicine and drinking water get through.

"Our aim is to move as soon as possible to an interim authority run by Iraqis. This will pave the way for a truly representative Iraqi government, which respects human rights and the rule of law; develops public services; and spends Iraq's wealth not on palaces and weapons of mass destruction, but on schools and hospitals."

US forces enter Baghdad

378. Mr Scarlett informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 5 April that the Republican Guard had suffered comprehensive defeat outside Baghdad, and that the loss of the airport appeared to have had a shock effect on the militias.²⁰¹ There was uncertainty about the militias' ability to reconstitute the defence of the city. The Republican Guard had evacuated positions in the North. With the disablement of communications and therefore control, the general sense was that the Iraqi regime was collapsing.

379. Adm Boyce stated that a heavy armoured US unit had entered Baghdad to demonstrate to the population that the regime had lost control. The question for Coalition commanders was whether to maintain the momentum and take Baghdad, or consolidate and establish a cordon round the city. In the North, the Regular Army had been badly damaged by air attack and might be prepared to capitulate. In the South, the British

¹⁹⁹ Letter No.10 [junior official] to McDonald, 4 April 2003, 'Iraq: Prime Minister's Video Conference with President Bush.

²⁰⁰ CNN, 4 April 2003, *Full text: Blair's open letter to Iraq*.

²⁰¹ Minutes, 5 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

Division had a plan to take over Basra in the next few days as the regime's hold on the city disintegrated.

380. Ms Short said that non-governmental organisations were confused about the duty of the military to provide humanitarian relief as the Occupying Power: “we should make plain that this responsibility would be handed back to United Nations agencies and non-governmental organisations as rapidly as possible”.

381. Mr Scarlett told the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 7 April that Baghdad was not defended in a coherent way, but paramilitaries and some elements of the Republican Guard continued to put up resistance.²⁰²

382. Adm Boyce informed the meeting that the isolation of Baghdad was not yet complete and that reinforcement of US forces was expected shortly to enable Coalition Forces to take Kirkuk and Mosul.

The wider Coalition campaign

21/22 March: Large scale Coalition air strikes on strategic targets including Baghdad, Mosul, Tikrit and Kirkuk.²⁰³

22 March: US forces reached Nasiriyah and secured several bridges across the Euphrates River.²⁰⁴ The Commander of the Iraqi 51st Division surrendered to Coalition Forces.

23 March: There was steady progress north. US V Corps – the forward line of advance – reached 100 miles south of Baghdad, near Najaf.²⁰⁵

1 MEF moved north-west out of Nasiriyah.²⁰⁶

24 March: Lead elements of US V Corps were in sight of Karbala, with main elements consolidating around Nasiriyah and Najaf.²⁰⁷

Key bridge at Nasiriyah seized intact.²⁰⁸ Coalition Forces reported to be around 280 miles into Iraq and advancing on Karbala and al-Kut.

By evening, the Coalition was reported to be: “Just ahead of expected timelines ... but weather deteriorating.”²⁰⁹ V Corps had paused near Najaf. All southern oilfields were under Coalition control.

25 March: US forces moved towards launch points for the assault on Baghdad.²¹⁰

²⁰² Minutes, 7 April 2003, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq.

²⁰³ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Manning, 22 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Overnight Sitrep – 21/22 March’.

²⁰⁴ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

²⁰⁵ Briefing [MOD], 23 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep – As at 0600Z 23 March 2003’.

²⁰⁶ Briefing [MOD], 23 March 2003, ‘Annex to Evening Sitrep 23 March: Military’.

²⁰⁷ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Manning, 24 March 2003, ‘Iraq: COBR Overnight Sitrep – 23/24 March (0715)’.

²⁰⁸ Minute Cannon to Prime Minister, 24 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Military Developments’.

²⁰⁹ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official], 24 March 2003, ‘Iraq: COBR Round Up of Key Events – 24 March’.

²¹⁰ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official], 25 March 2003, ‘Iraq: COBR Overnight Sitrep – 24/25 March’.

Lead elements of V Corps reached Karbala (60 miles south of Baghdad), but helicopter operations were frustrated by bad weather.²¹¹

The US 15 MEU, which had been under UK command for the initial invasion, was released to return to the US 1 MEF.²¹²

26 March: 1 MEF advanced towards al-Kut along two converging routes.²¹³

27 March: US 173rd Airborne Brigade began deployment into northern Iraq overnight.²¹⁴ The total of Coalition Forces in theatre reached 293,000.

Main land forces were resupplied and consolidated their positions.²¹⁵

28 March: 173rd Airborne Brigade took control of Erbil.²¹⁶

Tempo of air operations stepped up as weather improved, with the aim of degrading Republican Guard positions around Baghdad.²¹⁷

29 March: Iraqi forces launched two missiles towards Kuwait, both of which were shot down by US Patriot missiles.²¹⁸ The Coalition continued to attack Baghdad's air defence system. US 1 Marine Division secures Qalat Sikar.

30 March: In Kuwait, deployment of personnel and equipment from the US 4th Infantry Division was prioritised.²¹⁹ Republican Guard formations in Baghdad re-positioned, and were believed to be establishing a second line of defence.

Air attacks on Republican Guard divisions and other preparations for a ground offensive towards Baghdad continued.²²⁰

31 March: US forces attacked paramilitary forces and were in contact with Republican Guard forces south of Baghdad.²²¹

Air operations focused on Republican Guard ground forces, regime command and control elements and communications sites.²²²

1 April: A total of 19 missiles were "fired south from Iraq" towards Coalition Forces.²²³ US 1 MEF commenced an attack on the Baghdad Republican Guard Division around al-Kut.

²¹¹ Briefing [MOD], 25 March 2003, 'Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep – As at 1700Z 25 March 2003'.

²¹² Letter Watkins to Rycroft, 25 March 2003, 'Prime Minister's visit to Washington. Iraq: Review of the Military Situation'.

²¹³ Minute Cannon to Prime Minister, 26 March 2003, 'Iraq: Military Developments'.

²¹⁴ Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 27 March 2003, 'Iraq: VTC with Camp David: 27 March 2003'.

²¹⁵ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Manning, 27 March 2003, 'Iraq: COBR Round Up of Key Events – 27 March'.

²¹⁶ Minutes, 28 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

²¹⁷ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official], 28 March 2003, 'Iraq: COBR Round Up of Key Events – 28 March'.

²¹⁸ Briefing [MOD], 29 March 2003, 'Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep – As at 1630Z 29 March 2003'.

²¹⁹ Minute Gibbons to Manning, 30 March 2003, 'Iraq: Update – Noon Sunday 30 March'.

²²⁰ Minute Dodd to Manning, 30 March 2003, 'Iraq: COBR Round Up of Key Events – 30 March'.

²²¹ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Manning, 31 March 2003, 'Iraq COBR Overnight Sitrep 31 March – 1 April'.

²²² Briefing [MOD], 31 March 2003, 'Annex to Evening Sitrep: 31 Mar: Military'.

²²³ Briefing [MOD], 1 April 2003, 'Annex to Evening Sitrep'.

US forces continued to attack paramilitaries around Hindiyah, Samawah and Najaf, while moving towards Hillah.²²⁴

2 April: Ground and air forces continued to engage the Republican Guard.²²⁵ Most forward elements of Coalition ground forces were within 15 miles of Baghdad.

3 April: Elements of the US V Corps passed through Karbala and moved towards Baghdad.²²⁶ The lead elements of the US 3rd Infantry Division reached the outskirts of Baghdad.

4 April: US forces seized Baghdad International Airport.²²⁷

5 April: US V Corps entered central Baghdad.²²⁸

6 April: The first Coalition aircraft (a C130) landed at Baghdad International Airport.²²⁹

7 April: The US 3rd Infantry Division secured “all major routes in and out of Baghdad, from the South through to the North West”.²³⁰

8 April: US V Corps and 1 MEF continued to encircle Baghdad, conducting intelligence-led attacks.²³¹ A US A-10 aircraft was shot down over Baghdad by a surface-to-air missile; the pilot was recovered safely.

9 April: US forces entered Baghdad.²³² Iraqi civilians tore down statues of Saddam Hussein in central Baghdad with the aid of US Marines.

10 April: Kurdish forces, which had been operating alongside the US, took the opportunity to enter Kirkuk after encountering little Iraqi resistance.²³³ US Marines were ordered to prepare a plan to deploy to Kirkuk by 14 April to restore order.

12 April: US Marines advanced on Tikrit. Lt Gen McKiernan moved his command from Kuwait to a temporary HQ at Baghdad International Airport.²³⁴

13 April: The situation across Iraq began to stabilise, and moves began to restore utilities.²³⁵ US Marines continued to attack pockets of Iraqi resistance and secure the northern oilfields. Kurdish forces had withdrawn from Kirkuk.

On 16 April, Gen Franks issued his Freedom Message to the Iraqi People, which is described in Section 9.1.

²²⁴ Briefing [MOD], 1 April 2003, ‘Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep – as at 0600 1 April 2003’.

²²⁵ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official], 2 April 2003, ‘Iraq: COBR Round Up of Key Events – 2 April’.

²²⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 3 April 2003, columns 1069-1071.

²²⁷ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

²²⁸ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, December 2003.

²²⁹ Paper [unattributed], [undated], ‘Op TELIC PJHQ Chronology 2002-03’.

²³⁰ Paper [unattributed], [undated], ‘Op TELIC PJHQ Chronology 2002-03’.

²³¹ Briefing [MOD], 8 April 2003, ‘Annex to Evening Sitrep, 8 April 2003’.

²³² [Minute Cabinet Office \[junior official\] to Manning, 9 April 2003, ‘Iraq: COBR Round Up of Key Events – 9 April’](#).

²³³ Briefing [MOD], 10 April 2003, ‘Annex to Number 10 Sitrep, 10 April 2003: Military’.

²³⁴ Briefing Cabinet Office, 12 April 2003, ‘Iraq: Evening Round Up: 12 April’.

²³⁵ Briefing [MOD], 13 April 2003, ‘Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep – as at 1100 at 13 April 2003’.

The fall of Basra

383. On 5 April, Mr Hoon was informed of the plans to enter Basra. He was also informed that the issue of UK forces moving north from the original area of operations could arise “in the near future”.

384. Mr Johnson sent a summary of the plan for 1 (UK) Div to enter Basra to Mr Hoon’s Office on 5 April.²³⁶

385. Mr Johnson reported that the “planned window for entry into Basra opens on Monday 7 April”; and that the plan was split into three phases:

- Phase 1 intended to establish “a degree of control in az-Zubayr which is sufficiently firm to allow 7 Arm’d Bde units to be released for operations in Basra”, was already under way.
- Phase 2 would “involve a shift of forces from ‘consolidation’ tasks to operations in Basra, and subsequent expansion as required” in addition to the tasks of Phase 1. The plan had also called for elements of 3 Commando Brigade to replace 7 Armoured Brigade in az-Zubayr, enabled by the replacement of 3 Commando Brigade in Umm Qasr by the (UK) 102 Logistics Brigade.
- Phase 3 of the plan, entry into Basra, required 3 Commando Brigade and 7 Armoured Brigade to attack Iraqi forces, secure key water infrastructure, and take opportunities to seize Basra Palace and any Governorate buildings. 16 Air Assault Brigade would control Highway 6 and distract Iraqi forces by conducting “aggressive patrolling” north of Basra. It would also provide a reserve force.

386. Mr Johnson wrote that Phase 3 would take place only when a number of preconditions had been met, including:

- az-Zubayr was firmly under control and passed to 3 Commando Brigade;
- there was stability in the 3 Commando Brigade AO, with the area south of Basra isolated;
- stability existed in the 16 Air Assault Brigade AO, north of Basra;
- Highway 6 was capable of being controlled by 16 Air Assault Brigade; and
- authority was granted by the Coalition Forces Land Component Commander (Lt Gen McKiernan).

387. When the conditions were right, 3 Commando Brigade and 7 Armoured Brigade would “attack to secure areas of Basra, supported by air and artillery strikes”; 16 Air Assault Brigade would provide a reserve infantry battlegroup for the operation.

²³⁶ [Minute Johnson to PS/SofS \[MOD\], 5 April 2003, ‘1 \(UK\) Division Plan for entry into Basrah’.](#)

388. Mr Johnson reported that 1 (UK) Div's intention was that the entry into Basra would be:

“... supported by information operations, to reassure the population and isolate them from regime propaganda, and by humanitarian assistance ... The combined effect should be to build popular confidence in Coalition capabilities and intentions ... News of the US entry into Baghdad should reinforce this effect.”

389. Mr Johnson reminded Mr Hoon of the possible requirement for subsequent expansion northwards to “take on and defeat Iraqi forces posing a potential threat to Basra, if this was necessary to achieve a satisfactory outcome to Phase III of the overall campaign”. He stated: “This issue may well arise in the near future.” Mr Johnson also advised: “We therefore intend that GOC 1 (UK) Div should have flexibility to move north to defeat these forces or accept their surrender, if required.”

390. A second piece of advice, sent to Mr Hoon's Office later the same day, reported a proposal to “recruit, arm and co-ordinate the activity of 20 Iraqis to support 1 (UK) Div operations in Basra”.²³⁷ The advice recommended that Mr Hoon agree the proposal to recruit ex-regular soldiers to conduct reconnaissance into Basra, and to attack personnel linked to Saddam Hussein's regime, armed with weapons seized by Coalition Forces. The advice said: “At the end of the operation, the volunteers would be asked to return their weapons.”

391. An update for Sir David Manning provided by Mr Drummond on 6 April reported that a Coalition air strike in Basra had “resulted in the deaths of several top regime figures”.²³⁸ UK raids into the city the previous night had met “little resistance”. 7 Armoured Brigade “now have a lodgement well into the city, and, subject to CFLCC agreement, will push further in today”. The plan for 3 Commando was “to push in from the south-east”.

392. UK forces entered Basra in force on the night of 6/7 April.

393. Mr Scarlett told the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 7 April that, in Basra, the hard core of the militias had retreated into the old town, while senior party and military figures were reported to be leaving the city or willing to surrender.²³⁹ Rumours of the death of the regional military commander (Chemical Ali) were rife.

394. Adm Boyce reported that the British Division had entered Basra the previous night:

“... in force, following signs of impatience about the stand-off by the local population in the light of diminishing Iraqi militia confidence. Resistance was incoherent but still dangerous; locals were helping the Coalition inside the town.”

²³⁷ Minute Flaherty to PS/Secretary of State [Defence] 5 April 2003, ‘Op TELIC: Use of locally recruited forces in Basra’.

²³⁸ Minute Drummond to Manning, 6 April 2003, ‘Iraq – Update Noon Sunday 6 April’.

²³⁹ Minutes, 7 April 2003, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq meeting.

395. Mr Blair concluded the meeting by saying that the military success in Basra was significant and he was counting on an information campaign by the military to persuade the irregulars who were still fighting to desist. The Iraqi regime was finished and the irregulars should be taken into custody by the British, not lynched by fellow Iraqis.

396. Mr Hoon told the House of Commons on 7 April that:

“Since my last statement on 3 April, Coalition Forces have continued to make excellent progress. Following a series of raids and patrols into the centre of the city, British forces have now deployed in force into Basra. United States Army and Marine Corps units have with remarkable speed advanced on Baghdad, seized the international airport and conducted patrols into the city centre ...

“We have consistently encouraged members of the Iraqi armed forces to end their increasingly futile resistance and return to their homes and families. We are now beginning to see indications that these messages are having an impact, at least on some Iraqi soldiers. That does not mean, however, that the regime’s resistance is necessarily at an end. In Basra, Baghdad and other urban areas, Coalition Forces will face a difficult and dangerous period dealing with the remnants of Iraqi forces ...”²⁴⁰

397. The COBR evening round-up on 7 April described resistance in Basra as less than expected.²⁴¹

398. While no area was safe enough to call in humanitarian assistance, power and food were available to the majority of the population and the slight shortages of water were not significant.²⁴²

399. On 8 April, Mr Scarlett informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq, which was chaired by Mr Prescott, that the pattern of declining resistance in the South was not uniform; and that there was no definitive information about the find by Coalition Forces of material which could be chemical and biological warfare agents.²⁴³

400. Adm Boyce stated that, following the UK Division’s assumption of control over Basra, the emphasis would switch from fighting to the post-conflict phase. The Commander would be organising a meeting with local leaders the following day to re-establish normality in the town and to arrange the provision of food and water. The Southern Regional Director of the US-led Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Affairs would move to Umm Qasr that day.

²⁴⁰ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 7 April 2003, column 21.

²⁴¹ Minute Cabinet Office [junior official] to Manning, 7 April 2003, ‘Iraq: COBR Round Up of Key Events – 7 April’.

²⁴² Briefing [MOD], 7 April 2003, ‘Annex to Evening Sitrep, 7 April 2003’.

²⁴³ Minutes, 8 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

401. In discussion, the Ad Hoc Meeting noted that the welcome given to British troops entering Basra had been covered in very different ways by different television channels. The looting of regime premises should not be permitted to degenerate into general lawlessness. It was likely to be difficult to assure the civil police function as the Iraqi police had in the past been closely associated with the regime's apparatus of repression.

402. Mr Prescott concluded that the conduct of UK forces in assuming control of Basra had been commendable. Opportunities to conduct interviews with scientists who had been engaged on Iraq's WMD programmes should be "pursued when the fighting stopped".

403. The Chiefs of Staff were informed on 8 April that the troops clearing the old city area had been "met by a jubilant population".²⁴⁴

404. Mr Blair and President Bush made a joint statement at Hillsborough on 8 April setting out the Coalition's intentions for the future of Iraq, which is set out in Section 9.1.

405. A report that evening stated: "The situation in the city [Basra] has stabilised ... although looting will remain a problem until normal policing is restored."²⁴⁵

406. The overnight report from COBR on 8/9 April informed Sir David Manning that Maj Gen Brims had identified a potential local leader in Basra "with whom he can do business" and had begun the process of establishing a Joint Commission.²⁴⁶ Looting was "not as bad as reported in the media".

407. Adm Boyce informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 9 April that, in Basra, UK forces would be lowering their profile by withdrawing some of the heavy armour.²⁴⁷ The Commander had also started the process of establishing a Joint Commission which should help to restore order locally. Looting "was reducing, in part because of Iraqi self-policing."

408. Ms Short was concerned about the looting of humanitarian supplies and water plant in the South. In discussion, it was noted that looting in Basra was more isolated than some media suggested; and that the development of a civil policing capability was a priority.

409. In his post-operation tour report, Maj Gen Brims wrote:

"... collaborative planning, often led by 7 Armd Bde, was conducted to develop a concept for the entry into [Basra]. The order was published on 6 [April], coincidentally at the same time as the opportunity was seized by 7 Armd Bde. The opportunity was created by a JDAM [Joint Direct Attack Munition, a GPS-guided

²⁴⁴ Minutes, 8 April 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

²⁴⁵ Briefing [MOD], 8 April 2003, 'Annex to Evening Sitrep 8 April 2003: Military'.

²⁴⁶ Minute Gibbons to Manning, 9 April 2003, 'Iraq: COBR Overnight Sitrep 8/9 April'.

²⁴⁷ Minutes, 9 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

bomb] strike that seemed to have dramatically altered the situation in Basra (public perception was that Chemical Ali [Ali Hassan al-Majid] had been killed).”²⁴⁸

410. The UK was well informed about the structure and capabilities of the Iraqi armed forces but it had no intelligence pre-conflict on Iraq’s plans for the defence of Basra. The JIC had assessed:

- many Regular Army units bypassed and left behind as the result of a rapid Coalition advance towards Baghdad would probably surrender rather than fight;
- only Baghdad was politically vital to the Iraqi regime; and
- there was little evidence that Iraq was preparing for a hard-fought defence of Basra and other urban areas in southern Iraq.

411. The DIS advised that Iraqi irregular forces, including the Fedayeen, were likely to be involved in the defence of Basra, but it did not predict the degree of initial resistance to Coalition Forces.

412. The assessments pre-conflict about the structure, conventional capabilities and intentions of the Iraqi armed forces, are set out in Section 6.1. The assessment of the Iraqi regime’s intentions in relation to the defence of Basra and the nature and intentions of Iraqi irregular forces is summarised in the Box below.

The defence of Basra and the role of irregular forces

On 4 July 2002, the JIC assessed that the “Saddam Fedayeen”, which were “under the control of Saddam’s oldest son” were “possibly 10–15,000 strong” and had “been used in the past to deal with civil disturbances”.²⁴⁹

In its Assessment of 21 August, the JIC judged that:

“Iraq’s likely strategy for a ground war would be to make any Coalition advance as slow and costly as possible, trying to force the Coalition to fight in urban areas.”²⁵⁰

The JIC stated:

“We have little insight into how the Iraqi military might plan to fight any ground war ... At present we have little evidence to judge whether Iraq sees urban or guerrilla warfare as feasible options. Iraqi effectiveness would be mitigated by problems of command and control, inadequate training and poor morale. We doubt that guerrilla activity would be very effective; urban warfare is more plausible.”

²⁴⁸ Report, ‘Post Operation Report – Version 2 Operation TELIC’, 6 October 2003.

²⁴⁹ [JIC Assessment, 4 July 2002, ‘Iraq: Regime Cohesion’](#).

²⁵⁰ [JIC Assessment, 21 August 2002, ‘Iraq: Saddam’s Diplomatic and Military Options’](#).

In the context of consideration of preparations for a campaign of terrorism and sabotage in the region, the Assessment also stated that:

“... we know that Iraqi Special Forces and other organisations, such as the ‘Saddam Fedayeen’, also possess the capability to conduct sabotage or terrorist attacks.”

The JIC did not consider the Fedayeen’s possible actions inside Iraq.

In its weekly intelligence summary of 16 October, the DIS advised that, given the limitations in Iraq’s capabilities:

“... the regime is leaning towards a war of attrition from within the cities. Provincial cities have been garrisoned with food and troops ... The regime’s aim is to lure Coalition Forces into the cities and effectively fix them ... Whilst Baghdad remains the vital centre of gravity, Coalition Forces will look to bypass provincial centres, leaving ... Iraqi forces trapped ...”²⁵¹

In its Assessment of 6 December, the JIC anticipated that the Iraqi Army could establish positions within urban areas, but “most R[egular] A[rmy] defences are likely to be constructed further forward, nearer Iraq’s borders, or along key roads and at junctions”.²⁵² Physical barriers, “water barriers (created by flooding or by the destruction of bridges), minefields, or possibly even CBW-contaminated areas”, could be created “to channel Coalition Forces into urban areas or ‘kill zones’ where artillery, or CBW, would be used”. The Iraqi “strategy would rely heavily on a static defence, largely because the Iraqi military’s ability to conduct manoeuvre warfare is very limited, even in the R[epublican G]uard”.

The JIC stated:

- “... provided the security and military organisations central to the regime’s survival ... remained intact, Saddam would accept the sacrifice of virtually any forces or territory to the coalition. Provincial cities would be defended, but ultimately we judge that only Baghdad would be politically vital, as its capture would be a final symbol of defeat of the regime.”
- If the Special Republican Guard and the Republican Guard remained loyal and effective, they could “inflict serious casualties on Coalition Forces in urban warfare”.
- Morale and loyalty was “weak”. If a rapid Coalition advance left Iraqi positions behind the front lines, “many RA [Regular Army] units would probably surrender rather than fight”.

The JIC Assessment of 29 January 2003 stated:

“[M]orale in much of regular army is low and ... many soldiers are reluctant to fight. But as long as Iraqi security officers remain with military units and able to enforce discipline, fear of execution is likely to keep regular units at their posts.”²⁵³

In a minute to Sir David Manning on 30 January (see Section 3.6), Mr Scarlett wrote that the JIC had judged, “over many months”, that “once the invasion starts Saddam’s regime

²⁵¹ Paper DIS, 16 October 2002, ‘Saddam and the Dilemma of the Republican Guard’.

²⁵² [JIC Assessment, 6 December 2002, ‘Iraq: Military Options’](#).

²⁵³ [JIC Assessment, 29 January 2003, ‘Iraq: The Emerging View from Baghdad’](#).

is likely to prove brittle and fold quickly”.²⁵⁴ The correct military strategy was, therefore, designed to “make this ‘quickly’ very quick indeed”.

In its Assessment of 19 February on what the Coalition might face in Southern Iraq, the JIC judged:

“The Iraqi forces currently guarding Southern Iraq are a relatively weak first line of conventional defence. They face rapid defeat. There is little evidence so far that the Iraqis are preparing for a hard-fought defence of Basra and other urban areas.”²⁵⁵

The MOD advised Mr Blair on 24 February (see Section 6.2) that the US plan was to achieve “overwhelming effect very early in the campaign” to dislocate the regime by decapitating command and control and disrupting communications.²⁵⁶ As well as the practical consequences of the deployment of ground forces and their move “towards Baghdad”, the MOD stated that that should “remove any doubt in Iraqi minds about the Coalition’s determination to remove the regime. It is therefore possible that the regime will collapse ... in the first few days. Nonetheless it is impossible to predict ... and US planning assumes up to 125 days of decisive ground operations.”

On 11 March, the DIS produced a Memorandum on the “post-Saddam” political and security environment that Coalition Forces were likely to encounter in Basra City.²⁵⁷ It stated that the DIS had “no intelligence on regime planning to mount an urban defence of Basra City” but “individual or localised resistance could occur”.

The DIS identified the forces which were likely to be at the disposal of the regime as:

- **Directorate of General Security (DGS)** – the “principal internal security force”. “Typically” such forces would be lightly armed and trained only in an internal security role. The DIS assessed that once overall regime cohesion was lost, they would offer “little resistance to Coalition Forces”.
- **Ba’ath Party militia** – which were “expected to play a role in defence of the city. They would have small arms and limited training.” Based on reporting from other cities in Iraq, the DIS judged that the threat to Coalition Forces was “low”.
- **Saddam Fedayeen** – which might be employed in an internal security role. They had “a well-deserved reputation for brutality and fierce loyalty to the regime”. They were controlled by the Basra Governor and there might be “3–4,000” within the Governorate. They would have access to small arms “but rarely use armoured vehicles”. They were assessed to be “the most likely internal security force to repress the civil populace and possibly oppose Coalition Forces within the city”.
- **Mujahideen e Khalq (MEK)** – the numbers in Basra and its environs were “unlikely to exceed a few hundred”. If there was a presence in Basra, the DIS judged that it would fight, “if directly threatened by Coalition operations. But if they are left alone the intelligence is contradictory as to whether they would fight with the Iraqi Army ...” There was a risk that Iran would send Badr Corps or Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps teams into the Basra area to take action against the MEK, “especially if Tehran considers that the Coalition has not taken appropriate action against the MEK”.

²⁵⁴ [Minute Scarlett to Manning, 30 January 2003, ‘Iraq: JIC Assessment and Personal Observations’.](#)

²⁵⁵ [JIC Assessment, 19 February 2003, ‘Southern Iraq: What’s In Store?’](#)

²⁵⁶ [Letter Watkins to Rycroft, 24 February 2003, ‘Iraq: Political and Military Questions’.](#)

²⁵⁷ [Paper DIS, 11 March 2003, ‘Basra: Post Saddam Governance’.](#)

Lt Gen Fry told the Inquiry that the UK “did not necessarily know at the time” that Iraqi forces were weak; whether Iraq would use battlefield chemical weapons; and that the UK’s operational planning was looking at the potential Iraqi response “in as rigorous and austere military operational terms as possible”.²⁵⁸

Describing his assessment that his division was ready for military operations against the assessed capability of Iraqi forces and their likely courses of action, Lt Gen Brims, GOC 1(UK) Div between 2000 and 2003, and the UK Land Contingent Commander during the invasion, told the Inquiry that the UK had “expected unconventional forces ... to show, which they did”.²⁵⁹

ACM Burridge told the Inquiry that Saddam Hussein:

“... had developed the view ... that western militaries don’t do urban warfare ...

...

“What we didn’t know was to what extent he would front-load those southern cities, Basra in particular, and we subsequently recognised he put small elements of the Republican Guard in amongst the Ba’ath militia the Al Quds and people such as that, to ... make them militarily more effective and ... to put the frighteners on the 51 Division people who had effectively melted away, and they were coerced into getting back into their equipment.”²⁶⁰

413. Within days of the start of the campaign, the scale of the unexpected resistance encountered in Southern Iraq, together with the effects of bad weather and the slow down in the US advance on Baghdad, led to a media focus on perceived difficulties with the Coalition campaign.

414. The evidence in this Section shows that, as a result, there was considerable concern within the UK Government about the impact on public and political support for the campaign in the UK, and concern about the Coalition’s ability to convince the Iraqi population that it was determined and able to remove Saddam Hussein and his regime.

415. The UK Government identified a need for better co-ordination and communication of key strategic messages to different audiences in an effort to win the “propaganda war”. Improvements to UK capabilities were being implemented at the end of March.

416. There was also considerable debate, within and between the MOD and No.10, about whether the military plan should be revised to secure control of Basra before proceeding to Baghdad, including Mr Blair’s decision to raise the idea with President Bush.

²⁵⁸ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, pages 27-28.

²⁵⁹ Public hearing, 8 December 2010, page 22.

²⁶⁰ Public hearing, 8 December 2010, pages 38-39.

417. Although some of that debate within the UK Government may well have reached military commanders in Iraq, the evidence set out in this Section shows that, in the end, the decision to advance into Basra was made by military commanders on the ground.

418. It reflected their judgement that the preconditions for the operation, set out in the MOD advice to Mr Hoon of 5 April, had been met.

419. In a post-operation tour interview, conducted at the Army's Land Warfare Centre, Maj Gen Brims said:

"The raids themselves [in Basra] were going in ever more successfully too. On 5 April the battlegroup raids were staying in longer in each time, in essence they were doing [battlegroup vehicle checkpoints] coming back only at night because the enemy could get too close. But on Sunday 6 April the Black Watch launched a raid and met no resistance. I consulted Commander 7 [Armoured] Brigade [Brigadier Binns] and gave out radio orders. We got into Basra that day and stayed ... I did remember to get clearance from [the Coalition Forces Land Component Commander, Lt Gen McKiernan] beforehand."²⁶¹

420. Lt Gen Brims told the Inquiry:

"When we first got into Basra, it took about a day of combat activity to get in there on 6 April. By 7 April, we were in and we were reasonably well received ..."²⁶²

421. Lt Gen Brims also stated:

"We produced a generic plan [for Basra] and one of the first things I did when I realised that we had in fact got into Basra and we were controlling the city, is I got together through an individual I approached and asked him to form a provisional council from which we would then use the Iraqis to help us organise Basra ..."²⁶³

422. Maj Gen Binns told the Inquiry:

"... I didn't really have a clear idea of how we were going to enter Basra. The operational analysts were saying, 'It will take you three months, you will suffer 25 percent casualties and there will be thousands if not tens of thousands of civilian deaths' and Robin Brims and I then had a conversation, 'Well we can't do that and therefore we've got to come up with a different way of doing it, so we will only enter Basra, hopefully on our terms, when the time is right and in a manner that reduces casualties on both sides' ...

"... and I remember a conversation ... if Baghdad falls Basra might fall ... we might just drive in. And then another conversation, 'Well actually it would be good to have

²⁶¹ Transcript Land Warfare Centre, 8 January 2004, Op TELIC Interview.

²⁶² Public hearing, 8 December 2009, page 35.

²⁶³ Public hearing, 8 December 2009, page 33.

a go at Basra because we could learn some lessons ... and there may be some techniques ... that might be relevant for Baghdad' ...

"I then had a sort of conversation with a friend of mine who was working in General McKiernan's headquarters. I said, you know, 'Have I got this right, this is my thinking', and he said, 'Actually the view here is that we would like you to go into Basra as soon as you can'. So mindful of that, in early April ... we were doing a number of raids in and out of Basra to test how far we could go and I said to the commanding officers 'Well, you know, start pushing a bit further and a bit further and let's see how far we can go.'"²⁶⁴

423. Major General Albert Whitley, the Senior British Land Adviser to the Coalition Forces Land Component Commander, told the Inquiry:

"As I understand it there was no pressure from Whitehall or PJHQ to influence the timing of the taking of Basra. Gen McKiernan also did not put pressure on Gen Brims to take it early. I was present when he told Gen Brims that he could take Basra when he was ready and it was not a necessary precursor to taking Baghdad."²⁶⁵

424. SIS2 told the Inquiry that the Secret Intelligence Service had had "a pretty good war in terms of providing intelligence support for British forces in the South ... the battle for Basra ... That was an intelligence-led success."²⁶⁶

The collapse of the Iraqi regime

425. Adm Boyce informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 9 April that US forces controlled all routes into Baghdad, where resistance was "spasmodic but fierce".²⁶⁷ In the South, "US forces would be sweeping south of Amara to meet up with British forces coming north".

426. By 9 April, 16 Air Assault Brigade had deployed north of Basra to al-Qurnah (15km inside the northern boundary of Basra province), with the Pathfinders (an element of the Parachute Regiment) located 15km further north.²⁶⁸

427. The COBR evening round-up of key events on 9 April said the ICRC had "reported to DFID violent looting in Baghdad, and an almost complete breakdown of law and order in many areas".²⁶⁹ Looting also continued in Basra, Umm Qasr and elsewhere in the South, with the result that some water plants in Basra had become unserviceable.

²⁶⁴ Private hearing, 2 June 2010, page 33.

²⁶⁵ Statement, 25 January 2011, page 8.

²⁶⁶ Private hearing, 2010, page 33.

²⁶⁷ Minutes, 9 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

²⁶⁸ Minutes, 9 April 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

²⁶⁹ [Minute Cabinet Office \[junior official\] to Manning, 9 April 2003, 'Iraq: COBR Round Up of Key Events – 9 April'](#).

428. Mr Scarlett informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 10 April that news of the collapse of the regime was spreading.²⁷⁰

429. Adm Boyce added that Iraqi forces remained in Tikrit, Mosul and Kirkuk, although there were indications that the Regular Army was ready to surrender to Coalition Forces once those were in the vicinity in sufficient strength. Resistance in the East and West had “reduced significantly” and Basra “[was] returning to normality”. The Coalition needed to bring the “large quantity of abandoned arms and military equipment under control”. The lack of mains electricity was attributable to Iraqi sabotage. Looting was a problem in Baghdad but was “much reduced in Basra”.

430. In discussion, attendees noted that records and other material about the regime’s activities should be carefully preserved and their provenance recorded, and a system should be put in place for the collection of all relevant material, including on WMD, which could be accessed for forensic purposes.

431. Concluding the discussion, Mr Blair stated that the Coalition’s Freedom Television station would start broadcasting that day. It was important to provide evidence to the media of Iraqi sabotage of the electricity network. Assembling documentation and material about the former Iraqi regime was a priority task and resources should be directed to this.

432. In response to Mr Straw’s concerns that the “continental European media was not reflecting the Coalition’s success or the argumentation for military action”, Mr Blair concluded that a media campaign should be directed at rectifying the portrayal in the European media of events leading up to the conflict and its resolution.

433. Mr Blair informed Cabinet on 10 April that the military campaign in Iraq was progressing well, but it was not over yet.²⁷¹ Some resistance to US forces continued in Baghdad. The Iraqis might make a last stand in the North, perhaps around Tikrit. In the West and East, Iraqi resistance was diminishing. In the South, resistance had largely disappeared. After initial looting in Basra, the situation was now calmer.

434. Mr Blair stated that the Coalition was now in the end game of the Iraqi regime’s collapse. Apart from military resistance, there were humanitarian challenges, including restoring the electricity system which had been sabotaged by the retreating militias. Making the lot of the Iraqis better had to be the continuing focus. While British public opinion recognised our success to date, media coverage in the rest of the world was largely negative. That had to be turned round. The first Coalition broadcast to the Iraqi people using their network would take place that day.

435. Mr Hoon told his colleagues that elements of the Iraqi regime had not yet recognised that the battle was lost.

²⁷⁰ Minutes, 10 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

²⁷¹ Cabinet Conclusions, 10 April 2003.

436. In Basra, the water and electricity supplies were being fixed and order was being restored with the exercise of civic responsibility by local Iraqis. A Joint Commission was being established with the emerging leadership there. The intention was to spread the same effect northwards.

437. Concluding the discussion, Mr Blair said that the military campaign in Iraq was going extremely well, but there were challenges ahead on the humanitarian front, in dealing with post-conflict arrangements and bringing together the international community in the UN Security Council. Mr Blair reiterated his conclusion at the previous meeting of Cabinet that making the lives of ordinary Iraqis better was key to success.

438. When Mr Blair spoke to President Bush on 10 April, they discussed the position in Iraq, including the possibility of a major battle in Tikrit and the need to warn Syria not to give refuge to regime figures or to scientists who knew about Iraq's WMD.²⁷²

439. The UK AO was extended north to al-Amara in Maysan province on 11 April, when Pathfinders from 16 Air Assault Brigade entered the city. The remainder of the force entered on 12 April.²⁷³

440. Mr Hoon approved the extension of the UK AO to the whole of the provinces of Basra and Maysan on 12 April.²⁷⁴

441. The background to that decision and subsequent developments are addressed later in this Section.

The role of UK Special Forces

According to Gen Franks' account of his plan:

“... US, Brit, and Australian Special Operations Forces would control Iraq's western desert, preventing the regime freedom of action to launch long-range missiles towards Jordan and Israel.”²⁷⁵

Gen Franks described the combination of “several thousand” US Special Forces soldiers and Special Mission troopers, plus “British and Australian Special Air Service operators”, assembled in Jordan and Saudi Arabia ready to attack western Iraq as “the largest combat formation of special operators in history”.

From 23 March, the MOD sent regular updates on Special Forces' activities in Iraq to No.10.²⁷⁶

23 March: UK Special Forces were deployed to Iraq's western desert, conducting operations to deny theatre ballistic missile operations.

²⁷² Letter Rycroft to McDonald, 10 April 2003, 'Prime Minister's Conversation with Bush, 10 April'.

²⁷³ Minutes, 12 April 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

²⁷⁴ [Minute Watkins to CJO, 12 April 2003, 'Iraq: Expansion of the UK AOR'](#).

²⁷⁵ Franks T & McConnell M. *American Soldier*. HarperCollins, 2004.

²⁷⁶ Letter Williams to Manning, 23 March 2003, 'Update on Special Forces Activities'.

A small team conducted reconnaissance of Basra.²⁷⁷

24 March: UK Special Forces supporting 1 (UK) Div were on standby to enter Basra; in the absence of permission to do so, they passed information from within the city to Maj Gen Brims.²⁷⁸

25 March: UK Special Forces continued to assist in planning for entry into Basra by conducting further reconnaissance.²⁷⁹ The MOD assessed it was “too soon to divert effort from the strategically critical task of countering the ballistic missile threat in the West”.

DSF1 told the Inquiry that there were Special Forces units “in the South in support of the overall effort”.²⁸⁰ Those forces were there to “support the conventional operation with the British forces ... into Basra”.²⁸¹

DSF1 described the role of Special Forces as providing information to inform target selection, for instance:

“... to establish where members of the Ba’ath Party and some of the Fedayeen were meeting, which obviously was not in the Ba’ath Party headquarters, which had been destroyed ... by the strike quite early on.”²⁸²

26 March: Special Forces continued to support targeting in Basra and the team was enhanced with extra personnel.²⁸³

27 March: Special Forces were in discussion with key individuals in Basra, who gave indications that they were prepared to co-operate with UK forces.²⁸⁴

28 March: Operations continued in western Iraq to interdict Iraqi movement and so prevent missile launches, and in Basra to support targeting.²⁸⁵

30 March: Special Forces supported Black Watch raids into Basra.²⁸⁶

3 April: Operations in the West continued, clearing Named Areas of Interest and engaging directly with the enemy.²⁸⁷ Support in Basra continued.

5 April: Special Forces personnel in Basra were reinforced, and integrated with UK battlegroups to assist 7 Armoured Brigade.²⁸⁸

²⁷⁷ Minute Gibbons to Manning, 23 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Update Sunday 23 March (1100)’.

²⁷⁸ Minute Williams to Manning, ‘Update on Special Forces Activities’.

²⁷⁹ Minute [MOD], 25 March 2003, ‘Iraq – Update on UK Special Forces Activities’.

²⁸⁰ Private hearing, 2010, page 7.

²⁸¹ Private hearing, 2010, page 11.

²⁸² Private hearing, 2010, page 21.

²⁸³ Minute [MOD], 26 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Update on UK Special Forces Activities’.

²⁸⁴ Minute Cannon to Rycroft, 27 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Prime Minister’s video-conference with Bush, 27 March’.

²⁸⁵ Letter Williams to Manning, 28 March 2003, ‘Update on Special Forces Activities’.

²⁸⁶ Minute [MOD], 30 March 2003, ‘Operation TELIC – Update on UKSF Activities – 30 March 2003’.

²⁸⁷ Minute [MOD], 3 April 2003, ‘Op TELIC – Update on UKSF Activities – 3 April 2003’.

²⁸⁸ Minute [MOD], 5 April 2003, ‘Iraq: Update on UKSF Activities – 5 April 2003’.

After major combat operations ended, DSF1 told the Inquiry, UK Special Forces moved to Baghdad, because:

“That’s where our main principal linkage, that’s where my sense of how we could best support ... my view is that Special Forces quite rightly operate at a higher level, and therefore it is about actually the success of the campaign.”²⁸⁹

DSF2 told the Inquiry that when he assumed command in 2003, the main force was in Baghdad “on a mission from CJO to assist the people finding weapons of mass destruction”.²⁹⁰

The immediate aftermath

442. Maj Gen Binns told the Inquiry that he had not felt constrained by the absence of a policy on what to do when Basra fell.²⁹¹ Nor had his forces trained for that role. He felt he had sufficient freedom of action and the experience and knowledge from previous operations, including operations with some of 7 Armoured Brigade in Pristina (Kosovo), to know what to do and to create the environment for stability.

443. Gen Jackson told the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 11 April that anarchic behaviour in Baghdad, and earlier in Basra, was directed mainly at the regime, and was not generalised lawlessness.²⁹² It would be some days before the situation calmed down in Baghdad; in Basra, the adaptability of British troops in managing security had had a good effect. The problem was that civil policing had largely disappeared because of its association with the Ba’athist regime and would be difficult to resurrect because of the vulnerability of individuals to reprisals. This is considered in more detail in Section 12.1.

444. Mr Hoon said that responsibility for security fell in the first instance to the military and the UK was active in encouraging police in the South to return to duty. The Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) – described in detail in Section 10.1 – would be involved in restoring the civil administration of Iraq.

445. Ms Short stated that the ICRC and UN agencies were concerned about lawlessness in Baghdad and elsewhere. Hospitals in particular needed to be secured. The systems in place for the distribution of food and the restoration of the water supply were disabled by the lack of security.

446. Mr Scarlett told those present that the vacuum created by the collapse of the regime was being filled in different ways in different parts of the country. Gen Jackson stated that the US was putting forces into Kirkuk and Mosul, the latter to take the surrender of elements of the Regular Army.

²⁸⁹ Private hearing, 2010, page 26.

²⁹⁰ Private hearing, 2010, page 2.

²⁹¹ Private hearing, 2 June 2010, pages 10-14.

²⁹² Minutes, 11 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

447. Concluding the discussion, Mr Blair said that the security situation in the cities had to be stabilised, particularly for hospitals. Although a violent release of anger in response to the fall of the regime was inevitable, the humanitarian situation had to be improved. The three basics were food, water and healthcare, on which DFID should provide advice on both the current situation and the strategy for the future. More broadly, Iraq had some way to go before the outlook was satisfactory. Meanwhile we had to nurture the beginning of a different attitude towards the post-conflict situation among the international community.

448. On 12 April, Gen Jackson told the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq that:

“... lawlessness was the main problem. The situation in Basra was being brought under control and the British Division intended to start joint military/[Iraqi] civil police patrols within 48 hours. Baghdad was a bigger problem ...”²⁹³

449. Ms Short reported that UN vehicles had been looted in Baghdad and that the ICRC feared the outbreak of disease. Disorder in Baghdad and elsewhere was preventing the return of UN agencies. Mr Hoon suggested that getting UN agencies and others back to work in the South would enable the British to set an example of how to restore normality. This would create a virtuous circle which could progressively be replicated by the Americans further north.

450. Concluding the discussion, Mr Blair said that disorder in Iraq was the main issue. It was important to stabilise the situation in Iraq before engaging on the UN track and the establishment of an Iraqi interim authority.

451. HQ 1 (UK) Div moved to Basra Airport on 13 April.²⁹⁴

452. 1 (UK) Div continued to advance north of Basra, into Maysan province.²⁹⁵

453. Joint UK patrols with Iraqi police officers commenced in Basra on 13 April (see Section 9.1).²⁹⁶ Local populations set up their own security arrangements in some other towns in the UK AO.

454. 16 Air Assault Brigade secured the air field at al-Amara on 13 April.²⁹⁷ The situation in al-Amara was described as “stable”, with looting having ceased.²⁹⁸ The local police had “disbanded and disappeared” about a week earlier, leaving “rather ad hoc” security arrangements.

²⁹³ Minutes, 12 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

²⁹⁴ Minute Thomas to Manning, 13 April 2003, ‘Iraq: COBR Round Up of Key Events – 13 April 2003’.

²⁹⁵ Briefing [MOD], 13 April 2003, ‘Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep – As at 1100 13 April 2003’.

²⁹⁶ Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq Lessons for the Future*, December 2003; Note MOD, [undated], ‘MOD Note on Policing Situation’.

²⁹⁷ Briefing [MOD], 13 April 2003, ‘Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep – As at 1100 13 April 2003’.

²⁹⁸ Note MOD, [undated], ‘MOD Note on Policing Situation’.

455. Adm Boyce informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 14 April that the military campaign was coming to an end and that Gen Franks had said the Coalition was within a few days of declaring the switch to post-conflict operations.²⁹⁹ Adm Boyce had visited British troops in the South who were “in good heart and demonstrating their flexibility in dealing with the shifting security situation”. Consideration was being given to the security management of the post-conflict phase, where the British Division might take charge of two provinces and supervise a further two with other troops joining the Coalition for that purpose.

456. Mr Blair concluded that progress needed to be made on policing.³⁰⁰

457. The issue of looting in Baghdad was also discussed in Mr Blair’s conversation with President Bush on 14 April.³⁰¹

458. Mr Blair identified improving conditions in hospitals as the top humanitarian priority and the main focus of media interest; Baghdad was still not a safe environment for humanitarian assistance.

UK comments on levels of deployed US forces

Reporting on his visit to UK forces in Kuwait in early March 2003, Gen Jackson, wrote that he had been “struck by just how little combat power the US have on the ground now that 4ID cannot deploy in time to influence the outcome”.³⁰² The UK would have “a little under one third of the available Coalition armour”. That combat power “may prove decisive for operations around Baghdad”.

Admiral the Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that he was:

“... always extremely concerned about the anorexic nature of the American contribution, and not just because the Fourth Infantry Division was taking a while to get there, but because it was Rumsfeld’s view ... that the Americans, certainly at that particular stage ... were very much, ‘We are here to do the war fighting, not the peacekeeping.’ And combine that with the obsession that Mr Rumsfeld had with network-centric warfare and therefore to prove that you could minimise the number of your troops, in particular, because you had clever methods of conducting warfare, other than using boots on the ground, meant that ... we were desperately under-resourced ... so far as those forces going towards Baghdad were concerned.

“So, once the battle had been won, we didn’t have the boots on the ground to consolidate.”³⁰³

²⁹⁹ Minutes, 14 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

³⁰⁰ Minutes, 14 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

³⁰¹ Letter, Cannon to McDonald, 14 April 2003, ‘Iraq: Prime Minister’s conversation with Bush, 14 April’.

³⁰² [Minute GCS to CDS, 10 March 2003, ‘CGS Visit to Op TELIC’](#).

³⁰³ Public hearing, 3 December 2009, page 100.

Asked about the limits of the forces deployed by the US and the consequential importance of the UK's role in protecting the US flank, Lieutenant General Sir Robert Fry told the Inquiry, "we were taking a risk, we knew we were taking a risk".³⁰⁴

DSF1 told the Inquiry:

"The force levels were limited, there was no force that could be put out into the Euphrates Valley because there was no force available. The force was capable of knocking off, with the air and the land and the marine manoeuvre, it was [cap]able of removing the Republican Guard and the force that was in place. It was not capable of securing a country."³⁰⁵

The end of combat operations

459. Mr Blair made a statement to the House of Commons on 14 April, reporting that "less than four weeks" from the outset of the conflict "the regime of Saddam is gone, the bulk of Iraq is under Coalition control and the vast majority of Iraqis are rejoicing at Saddam's departure".³⁰⁶

460. Mr Blair continued: "Whatever the problems following Saddam's collapse – and in the short term they are bound to be serious – let no-one be in any doubt: Iraq is a better place without Saddam." Mr Blair added: "British forces have performed in Iraq with extraordinary skill, professionalism and compassion. We can be deeply proud of them."

461. Mr Blair gave the House of Commons the following assessment of the situation in Iraq:

"The South of Iraq is now largely under British control. The West is secure, and in the major town of al-Qa'im fighting is diminishing. In the North, Kurdish forces have retired from Kirkuk and Mosul, leaving US forces in control. US forces are in and around Tikrit. They are meeting some resistance. But in essence, all over Iraq, Saddam's forces have collapsed. Much of the remaining fighting, particularly in Baghdad, is being carried out by irregular forces. In Baghdad itself, the Americans are in control of most of the city but not yet all of it.

"As is obvious, the problem is now the disorder following the regime's collapse. Some disorder, frankly, is inevitable. It will happen in any situation where a brutal police state that for 30 years has terrorised a population is suddenly destroyed. Some looting, too, is directed at specific regime targets, including hospitals that were dedicated for the use of the regime. But it is a serious situation and we need to work urgently to bring it under control."

462. Mr Blair's description of the next phase of activity in Iraq is set out in Section 9.1.

³⁰⁴ Public hearing, 16 December 2009, page 42.

³⁰⁵ Private hearing, 2010, page 17.

³⁰⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 14 April 2003, columns 615-617.

463. Mr Iain Duncan Smith, the Leader of the Opposition, congratulated Mr Blair for the “heavy burden” that he had carried and added, “but he will have been comforted throughout by the conviction that he was doing the right thing for Britain and for the rest of the world”.³⁰⁷

464. Mr Scarlett informed the 16 April Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq, chaired by Mr Prescott, that organised Iraqi resistance had ceased.³⁰⁸ The threat to Coalition Forces was from paramilitaries, concentrated particularly in Baghdad. In the North, there was the potential for inter-ethnic clashes.

465. Adm Boyce stated that military operations were directed at confronting terrorism, mainly from foreign volunteers. The US was reducing its armoured presence in Baghdad. In Basra and the South, normalisation continued with increased policing and the population returning to work.

466. Concluding the discussion, Mr Prescott said that it was important to continue to improve conditions for Iraqis. There were questions about the number of troops still on standby for fire-fighting duties arising from the “upcoming proposition to replace British military units now in Iraq with others from the United Kingdom”. He would take forward discussions with Mr Hoon before reporting to Mr Blair.

467. Gen Franks issued his “Freedom Message to the Iraqi People” on 16 April (see Section 9.1).

UK influence on the planning and conduct of the military campaign

468. The evidence set out in Section 6.1 about the debate on the UK contribution to a US-led military campaign shows how the scale and nature of the UK contribution were regularly cited as vital for securing UK influence on the US military timetable and on the campaign plan.

469. It is not possible to determine with certainty the degree to which the UK influenced the planning and conduct of the military campaign in Iraq, or whether the scale and nature of the UK contribution were the key factors in securing such influence.

470. There will have been specific areas in which individuals working directly with US colleagues, as well as the UK Government as a whole, did have an impact.

471. Influence on operational decisions which directly affected participating UK forces, for instance on their roles or the targets to be attacked, was more likely to be achieved than influence on higher-level decisions. The quality of the

³⁰⁷ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 14 April 2003, column 618.

³⁰⁸ Minutes, 16 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

senior UK officers who were able to work closely with the US chain of command is likely to have been one of the most important determinants of influence on operational matters.

472. Overall, however, the plan and its implementation reflected US decisions and priorities.

473. While the evidence does not suggest it was the determining factor in the choices made by the UK Government about the forces deployed for military operations in Iraq, the likelihood of influencing US decisions should not be overstated. In any future consideration of the UK contribution to any US-led operation where the scale and nature of that contribution is essentially discretionary, as it was in Iraq the UK should be more realistic about what can be achieved.

474. In addition, for success, clarity is required about:

- the objectives to be sought;
- their importance to the UK national interest; and
- how they are to be achieved.

475. The UK's desire and ability to influence the US military timetable and wider strategic choices about the use of military force, including whether conditions identified by the UK had been met, are addressed in Sections 3.1-3.8.

476. The UK influence on US thinking at the early stages of the development of the campaign plan for an invasion of Iraq in the summer and early autumn of 2002, and in particular the need for a second, northern axis, is addressed in Section 6.1.

477. The other evidence available does not enable the Inquiry to make a considered judgement about specific issues on which the UK successfully influenced US decisions.

478. On 14 March 2003, Adm Boyce described the final campaign plan as “designed by the US, although it has been, and continues to be, influenced by UK officers embedded in the various relevant US and Coalition headquarters”.³⁰⁹

479. In his National Contingent Commander's report, dated 8 May, AM Burrridge judged that:

“Embedding staff in HQ CENTCOM allowed the UK to exercise significant influence and maintained a very nimble information flow.”³¹⁰

³⁰⁹ Minute CDS to SofS [MOD], 14 March 2003, ‘Operation TELIC Command and Control’.

³¹⁰ Minute Burrridge to Reith, 8 May 2003, ‘Operation TELIC – Report by NCC’.

480. On 30 May, PJHQ concluded that the UK “decision action cycle was slower and less well informed than it needed to be”.³¹¹ Differences in US and UK structures had contributed to that.

481. PJHQ recommended that influencing the US would best be achieved through UK personnel developing strong personal links – and leverage – in US headquarters, including co-locating the UK Joint Commander with the US Combined Forces Command in all future operations, maintaining “permanent liaison in strength with CENTCOM”, and establishing an “early UK presence with other Combatant Commands in the build up to an operation”.

482. PJHQ also concluded that the UK had “had a great deal of influence over the conduct of the air campaign at the operational/tactical level”.

483. Influence at the strategic level had, however, been “reduced by the different US and UK C2 [command and control] systems”, where US political direction went direct to General Franks rather than through the US Joint Chiefs of Staff.

484. PJHQ recommended that the differences between the UK and US military structures had to be recognised and the UK should review what had been achieved and how best the UK might influence future US campaign plans.

485. In October, Maj Gen Brims wrote in his post-operation report that the UK had influenced the US only at the tactical level, although the deployment of AM Burr ridge had gone some way to ensuring influence at Lt Gen McKiernan’s level.³¹²

486. In a report dated 17 October, the DOC judged that “the provision of Liaison Officers in key locations in the US military chain of command played a significant role in securing a degree of influence with the US”.³¹³

487. The DOC concluded:

“The UK must maintain the means of influencing the policy, planning and conduct of a campaign in a Coalition context, specifically with the US, at an early enough stage to have an effect.”

488. Air Chief Marshal Sir Brian Burr ridge told the Inquiry that the decision to compress the timing of the air campaign to coincide with the land campaign had been taken to allow the Coalition to deal with the strategic risks simultaneously, and the UK had encouraged that.³¹⁴

³¹¹ Minute CJO to DOC, 30 May 2003, ‘Operation TELIC – Phase III Top 10 Lessons Identified’ attaching Annex C.

³¹² Report [MOD], 6 October 2003, ‘Post Operation Report – Version 2 Operation TELIC’.

³¹³ Report Directorate of Operational Capability, 17 October 2003, ‘Operation TELIC Lessons Study’.

³¹⁴ Public hearing, 8 December 2009, page 48.

489. In the context of a question about planning for Phase IV, Sir Brian questioned whether the MOD had achieved wider influence:

“I just don’t think they [the MOD] could get strategic traction. I don’t think the machinery of government ... was in a shape, phase or form that they could get traction.

“I know that the nature of the way in which the US ... ran an operation was different ... so the endless dialogue that we could have with the Joint Staffs in the Pentagon which allowed us to grapple and influence ... I perhaps wouldn’t go so far as to say it wasn’t available, but it was made very much more difficult.”³¹⁵

490. General Sir John Reith told the Inquiry that he had made the point to Gen Franks that it would be essential to secure the oilfields rather than have them destroyed, and that the phasing of the plan had subsequently been revised to include an early land entry.³¹⁶

491. Gen Reith considered that it was the UK’s niche capabilities and US respect for UK “staffing” that gave it influence, rather than the number of UK forces.³¹⁷

492. Lord Boyce told the Inquiry that:

“So far as influence is concerned ... there is no doubt in my mind anyway that to produce something of a divisional size force rather than a brigade size force would give us influence with the Americans in what was going on, not just in Iraq but also in other relationships as well ... I believe we did have influence. It forced the Americans to go down the UN route ... It certainly involved ... at the tactical level, quite a lot of shaping of tactics which we were able to influence and which I can’t give you the detail of ... [A] number of our commanders ... at quite a junior level – would get traction in a way which they would not have done if we had not had a divisional size contribution.

“... in terms of targeting ... We shaped quite a lot of the American thinking ...

“... It allowed me to pick up the phone every day to talk to General Myers or General Franks.”³¹⁸

³¹⁵ Public hearing, 12 December 2009, page 42.

³¹⁶ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, pages 42-43.

³¹⁷ Private hearing, 15 January 2010, page 57.

³¹⁸ Public hearing, 27 January 2011, pages 32-33.

493. In its report on the lessons of the conflict, published in March 2004, the House of Commons Defence Committee concluded that it was:

“... not ... able to define the areas in which the British made specific contribution to what was essentially an American campaign plan, other than in the consideration of the northern option and in niche capabilities such as special forces operations.”³¹⁹

494. The Defence Committee concluded that there was:

“... clear evidence of UK influence on the air targeting operations ... Principally this influence seems to have been applied to issues of perception ... The extent to which the UK persuaded the US out of attacking certain targets on grounds of principle is less clear. We asked MOD for specific examples of UK influence but they failed to provide any, even on a classified basis.”³²⁰

495. In the context of the US system in which the deployed commander reports directly to the Secretary of Defense, the Defence Committee recommended that the MOD should consider:

“... whether the highest levels of British command structures might be made more adaptable ... to operate more closely with their American counterparts ...”

496. The Government response stated that the MOD believed “that the contribution made by UK officers was influential in the overall shape of the plan”. It specifically identified the roles played by Lt Gen Reith, the CDS liaison officer in the Pentagon, and Major General David Wilson, the Senior British Military Adviser within CENTCOM.³²¹

497. The Government also stated that it was:

“... sorry that the Committee has stated that we failed to provide them with examples of UK influence. We provided ... classified material at the time ... The Committee did not indicate ... they were dissatisfied.”³²²

498. The Government did not agree that command structures should be adapted to operate more closely with the US system.³²³

³¹⁹ Third Report from the House of Commons Defence Committee, Session 2003-2004, *Lessons of Iraq*, page 5.

³²⁰ Third Report from the House of Commons Defence Committee, Session 2003-2004, *Lessons of Iraq*, page 7.

³²¹ House of Commons Defence Committee, *Lessons of Iraq: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2003-4*, 8 June 2004, page 2.

³²² House of Commons Defence Committee, *Lessons of Iraq: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2003-4*, 8 June 2004, page 7.

³²³ House of Commons Defence Committee, *Lessons of Iraq: Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2003-4*, 8 June 2004, page 6.

The transition to post-conflict operations

499. The expansion of the UK Area of Operations (AO) during conflict operations and the final extent of the post-conflict UK Area of Responsibility (AOR) are shown on Map 5 in Annex 4.

Definition and use of “Area of Operations” and “Area of Responsibility”

Area of Operations (AO): The UK military’s area of combat operations during the invasion of Iraq (Phase III of the campaign). It is the term applied during conflict and, in terms of time, space and force, is the area in which lethal force can be applied for a designated period of time.

Area of Responsibility (AOR): The term is usually applied in peace support operations. In Iraq, it referred to the area of southern Iraq for which the UK military was responsible during the post-conflict Occupation of Iraq (Phase IV of operations).

The two terms were not used consistently within the UK Government and were sometimes applied interchangeably in the same document.

Phase IV military planning papers

500. The transition from conflict (Phase III) to post-conflict (Phase IV) military operations began as soon as Coalition troops started to occupy Iraqi territory.

501. When that transition began there had been no systematic analysis of the UK’s military or civilian capacity to fulfil its likely obligations in the South in a range of different circumstances, including in a hostile security environment with low levels of Iraqi consent.

502. Mr Straw and Mr Hoon advised Mr Blair:

“The expectation is that UK forces would be responsible for a task focused on Basra and other key military objectives in the south-east of Iraq, which could include 20 percent of the Iraqi population.”

503. Mr Blair sought further advice on the size of any UK sector, the duration of the UK commitment and the exit strategy.

504. The absence of contingency plans and preparations, and the assumptions which shaped continuing discussions about the level and extent of the UK’s post-conflict military and civilian deployment, are addressed in Section 6.5.

505. Adm Boyce’s Execute Directive, issued on 18 March and addressed in detail earlier in this Section, directed Lt Gen Reith to “assume the UK Phase IV AO will be centred on Basra”.³²⁴

506. In line with the military plan approved by Mr Blair on 14 March, the Directive stated that, to “assist the Coalition in a timely and successful Phase III and to help in shaping Phase IV conditions in the UK AO”, Lt Gen Reith should exploit no further north than an east – west line running 90km south of al-Kut, ending at a point 50km north-east of al-Amara.

507. The Directive also stated that it was Adm Boyce’s “current intent ... that the UK should aim to draw down its deployed force to medium scale within four months of commencing offensive operations”.

508. Mr Hoon and Mr Straw sent Mr Blair a joint minute on the UK military contribution to post-conflict Iraq on 19 March.³²⁵ It stated that, immediately after the invasion:

“The expectation is that UK forces would be responsible for a task focused on Basra and other key military objectives in the south-east of Iraq, which could include 20 percent of the Iraqi population. This task is broadly proportionate to the size of the UK’s contribution to overall Coalition land forces ...”

509. Mr Straw and Mr Hoon also advised that it would be necessary to reduce the UK military contribution “to nearer a third by no later than the autumn in order to avoid long-term damage to the Armed Forces” and to remain within current defence planning assumptions. Scaling down to nearer a third would limit the UK contribution thereafter to “a maximum of around one brigade, a two-star [divisional] headquarters and possibly a contribution to higher level command and control”. They recommended telling the US now, for planning purposes, that this was the upper limit of the UK contribution.

510. The joint minute and the subsequent discussion and correspondence are described in more detail in Section 6.5. This Section identifies only the high level points in relation to possible UK command of a military sector.

³²⁴ [Minute CDS to CJO, 18 March 2003, ‘Op TELIC: Authorisation for Military Operations in Iraq’ attaching Paper CDS, ‘Chief of Defence Staff Execute Directive to the Joint Commander for Operation TELIC \(Phases 3 and 4\)’.](#)

³²⁵ [Minute Straw and Hoon to Prime Minister, 19 March 2003, ‘Iraq: UK Military Contribution to post-conflict Iraq’.](#)

511. Before the joint minute from Mr Straw and Mr Hoon reached No.10, Mr Drummond advised Mr Rycroft that “we need Ministers to decide on sectors”.³²⁶ He suggested that they would want to agree the proposals in the joint minute:

“... provided they are satisfied that:

- UK forces will be capable of providing security for an area around Basra including about 20 percent of Iraq’s population.
- How long we will have this responsibility, and what is the exit strategy (benign security environment created, UK forces replaced by others). Will we be able to limit ‘our area’ to say Basra by the autumn, when we want to withdraw two thirds of our troops?”

512. After the Ministerial meeting on post-conflict issues on 21 March, Mr Rycroft informed the FCO and MOD that Mr Blair agreed to the recommendations made by Mr Straw and Mr Hoon, subject to further urgent advice on the size of any UK sector, the duration of the UK commitment and the exit strategy.³²⁷

513. Treasury officials advised Mr Brown that the minute from Mr Straw to Mr Hoon raised a number of issues, including that Treasury and MOD views differed on the wisdom of the UK taking on command of a sector in Iraq without “the necessary guarantees”.

514. Mr John Dodds, Head of the Defence, Diplomacy and Intelligence Team in the Treasury, sent advice on the Straw/Hoon joint minute to Mr Brown on 24 March.³²⁸

515. Mr Dodds told Mr Brown that US military planning appeared:

“... to have four ‘two-star commands (ie divisions)’ outside of Baghdad, focusing more flexibly on the tasks that need to be done, rather than being tied down to specific narrow locations.

“The MOD ambition is to have a UK-led ‘two-star [Maj Gen] command.’

516. Mr Dodds warned that the UK should not be too ready to take on a two-star command in the aftermath without “the necessary guarantees”. The military would “balk” at this: “a ‘two-star command’ would provide a seat at the top table in the aftermath”, but it carried the risk of costs “we cannot afford both militarily and financially”.

517. The FCO advised that it would not be possible to decide on the size of a UK military sector before establishing the nature of the task and the scale of the Coalition resources available.

³²⁶ [Minute Drummond to Rycroft, 19 March 2003, ‘Iraq Ministerial Meeting’.](#)

³²⁷ [Minute Rycroft to McDonald and Watkins, 21 March 2003, ‘Iraq: UK Military Contribution to Post-Conflict Iraq’.](#)

³²⁸ [Minute Dodds to Chancellor, 24 March 2003, ‘Iraq: UK Military Contribution to Post-Conflict Iraq’.](#)

518. The relationship between the size of a military sector and the wider contingent liabilities, including the impact on potential UK civilian responsibility for administration and reconstruction, was not addressed.

519. On 25 March, the FCO sent its response to Mr Blair's request for further advice on the size of a UK sector, the duration of the UK commitment and the exit strategy.³²⁹

520. The FCO advice, agreed with the MOD and copied to DFID and the Treasury, reflected much of Mr Dodds' advice to Mr Brown.

521. On the size of the UK sector, the FCO wrote:

“... we need to determine in the first instance the nature of the military task, and make an assessment of the UK and other Coalition resources likely to be available. Only then can we answer the question about geographical coverage. If the task is to promote a secure environment, the size of the area will depend on the number of troops that are available and the attitude of the Iraqis. The expectation is that Basra, and the area around it, linked to existing administrative boundaries, should be the focus. Plans need to remain flexible until we are able to define the task and confirm the attitude of the population. US thinking appears to have moved away from too early definition of ‘sectors’ for exactly the reasons explained above.”

522. In his statement to the Inquiry, Mr Blair wrote:

“We took the decision to take on responsibility for the South sector, following Jack Straw and Geoff Hoon's joint note to me of 19 March. This was the inevitable outcome of the decision that our military contribution should be through the South. I was also keen that this be our Area of Operation because it seemed clear that the South would be more manageable. The South – Shia and heavily anti-Saddam – was likely to be relatively supportive. And to begin with, this was indeed the case. It was agreed that we should do it, without demur, as I recall.”

523. Lt Gen Reith warned the Chiefs of Staff on 21 March that there were already signs that pre-conflict assumptions about the nature and duration of the conflict had been wrong, with implications for Phase IV planning.

524. Lt Gen Reith advised that the Coalition “must be prepared” for high, medium and low levels of consent.

525. Lt Gen Reith produced an update on Phase IV planning for the Chiefs of Staff on 21 March.³³⁰ He warned that Phase IV delivery remained subject to “uncertain US dynamics at the pol/mil [politico-military] level”. US planning continued, but was “primarily bottom-up”, and CFLCC was still seeking guidance on key issues including governance, payment of salaries and “regeneration” of the military.

³²⁹ Letter Owen to Rycroft, 25 March 2003, ‘Iraq: UK Military Contribution to Post-Conflict Iraq’.

³³⁰ Minute Reith to COSSEC, 21 March 2003, ‘Phase IV Planning – Taking Stock’.

526. Lt Gen Reith advised that there were already signs that previous assumptions about the nature and duration of the conflict might have been wrong. Phase IV(a) now looked likely to be far shorter than previously expected, while the arrival of other Coalition partners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) looked like taking longer. All this added pressure. Lt Gen Reith listed a number of issues needing resolution, pointing out that some were already well known. They included: the system of governance under Phase IV(b); how to approach Security Sector Reform (SSR); provision of salaries to Iraqis; and how to engage the Iraqi military and judiciary.

527. On “military realities”, Lt Gen Reith stated: “The Coalition must be prepared for high/medium/low consent and variations thereof in time and space, including asymmetric attack and intra-factional violence.” He listed “How to deal with non-compliance” as one of the “key issues requiring resolution”.

528. The draft Operational Concept for Phase IV prepared by Lt Gen Reith on 25 March:

- provided broad estimates of force requirements based on an expectation of growing popular consent in the South;
- anticipated that the US would ask the UK to assume responsibility for four provinces;
- cautioned that growing consent was dependent on a number of factors, including improvement to the quality of life for Iraqis;
- highlighted the critical importance of an authorising Security Council resolution and early bilateral UK engagement with potential force contributors;
- advised the Chiefs of Staff to balance the military’s “intention to draw down to below medium scale as rapidly as possible” against the UK’s “wider political objectives”; and
- advised that agreement with the US on a UK AOR “would allow planning for Phase IV to be taken forward in confidence”.

529. On 25 March, two UK military planning papers for Phase IV were sent to the Chiefs of Staff: a draft Operational Concept and draft Phase IV military planning guidance.

530. The draft Operational Concept for Phase IV, submitted by Lt Gen Reith, stated that:

“An enduring, operational level, concept is required to provide clarity and direction in a situation which is presently ill-defined and which could develop in a number of ways.”³³¹

³³¹ [Minute Reith to COSSEC, 25 March 2003, ‘Draft Operational Concept’ attaching Paper Reith, 25 March 2003, ‘Operation TELIC, Phase IV, The Joint Commander’s Draft Operational Concept’.](#)

531. The draft listed six constraints on UK military planning resulting from unresolved elements in pre-invasion preparation:

- there was unlikely to be a Security Council mandate for Phase IV in place for several weeks;
- in the absence of a mandate, military operations would “in varying degree, be both directed and constrained by the Hague and Geneva Conventions”;
- an uncertain strategic context that was likely to change over time;
- the duration and impact of war-fighting would set the conditions in which Phase IV would begin;
- the need for the operational design to be “broadly consistent with the US approach”; and
- the need for force levels to “conform to endorsed scales of effort”. There was “a recognised need for additional forces in Iraq to secure ground already taken, show Iraq-wide Coalition presence and provide CFLCC with operational flexibility”. The US planned a significant uplift in combat power, but not for a month.

532. The draft listed 10 “key deductions”:

- a. The strategic context to the operation lacks certainty. Internationalisation is likely to be slow as nations take a view on the likelihood of overall success before committing themselves.
- b. The operational design must be sufficiently flexible to remain coherent within an ill-defined strategic context which is likely to change.
- c. The posture and disposition of US and UK forces when combat operations are complete or when a surrender is concluded will be uncertain.
- d. On completion of combat, forces will be located in areas of operations for which they will have legal and military responsibilities which cannot be relinquished until handed over to a relieving force.
- e. CFLCC will adjust force dispositions on completion of Phase III and establish an Iraq-wide Coalition presence. The Coalition will be thinly spread and the UK will be expected to take its share of the risk/burden in order to establish a safe and secure environment.
- f. On completion of Phase III, UK forces will be allocated an AOR within which the legal and other obligations of an Occupying Power must be met. The AOR may not necessarily be contiguous from the outset, but we should aim for this as soon as possible.
- g. If there is no effective governance in place, forces will have responsibilities for co-ordinating, and in some cases delivering, many aspects of life in Iraq.
- h. The military role in support of the civil sector could be prolonged.

- i. In Iraq the provincial level provides the link between central government and local administration. Military boundaries should be coterminous with provincial boundaries, which will, in turn, define an AOR.
- j. There may be a need for more rather than less Coalition Forces in the short term, depending on the nature of the outcome of Phase III and the level of consent established as a result. The US will have no further formations available until late April.”

533. The draft recommended that “the operational design [of Phase IV] should be predicated on the empowerment of Iraqi institutions and mechanisms of governance appropriately supported by international military and other organisations”. That concept, known as the Joint Commission (JC) approach, was recommended as:

“... a proven and familiar model enabling effective civil-military crisis co-ordination. It allows the military to exercise authority and influence, yet promotes and fosters a sense of civilian ownership in the decision-making process. Initially the military would lead on a JC pulling together local authorities and other organisations including Iraqi military where feasible, into a single decision-making body. At lower levels, liaison teams mirror the function of the JC providing province-wide ‘ground truth’ and a focus for military advice and support to the civil authorities. The JC structure also provides the information to allow IO [international organisations]/NGO to feel secure and target need. At an appropriate time the JC lead would transition to the civil authorities, with the military adopting a supporting role.”

534. Plans for SSR were “undetermined”. The draft recommended that the Coalition “should attempt to retain as much of the Iraqi Regular Army intact as possible”.

535. On levels of Iraqi consent, the draft stated:

“The extended UK ‘box’ for Phase III extends north into Wasit province. We should anticipate that the US will ask the UK to assume responsibility for this province, as well as those to the south – Basra, Dhi Qar, Maysan. All are predominantly Shia and are generally not pro-regime. However, varying internal and external influences determine the overall threat and level of consent.

“Anti-Coalition sentiment is predicted as low in all provinces. However, in the immediate post-conflict period, UK forces could become involved in peace enforcement operations between opposing factions. Internal tensions are greatest in Wasit and probable in Maysan and Dhi Qar. Basra should be the easiest province to govern.”

536. The threat assessment for each of the four provinces was set out in an Annex, the accuracy of which would be “determined by the nature of the conflict, adjusted by a continuous assessment of risk”.

537. For Wasit, Maysan and Dhi Qar provinces, the Annex stated that revenge and retribution against the regime “could be high”. In Wasit it would represent “a sizeable internal security issue”; in Maysan and Dhi Qar, a “short-term internal security issue”. The section on Basra province stated:

“There will be some Iranian influence as the province shares a border with Iran ... Many tribes have been involved in anti-regime activities and, therefore, may be pro-Western ... Basra should be the most stable of the provinces in terms of threat environment, but the size of the population will bring its own inherent problems.”

538. The draft Operational Concept listed the military tasks for Phase IV, including:

- maintaining a safe and secure environment;
- supporting enforcement of the rule of law;
- supporting humanitarian assistance and reconstruction;
- supporting the interim civil administration;
- helping with the restoration of communications infrastructure; and
- supporting the transformation of Iraq’s armed forces.

539. The draft provided broad estimates of force requirements, based on expected levels of popular consent in each province.

540. The draft assessed the impact of factors affecting the military tasks:

“UK Capability ... assuming internal tensions are high, initial operations are likely to involve a continuous effort to preserve and maintain a consensual framework. This will potentially require a brigade level of command for each province. At the present scale of effort the UK has the capacity to do this, accepting some operational risk, but at prejudice to our ability to reduce force levels in the short term ...

“Iraqi Reactions. As internal tensions subside, consent in Iraq will grow dependent on confidence in the US inspired IIA [Iraqi Interim Authority], engagement of local Iraqi governance and growth of HA [Humanitarian Assistance]/immediate reconstruction to improve the quality of life. The Iraqi population must also be convinced that our presence is temporary. There is a direct link to our exit strategy here; as consent in Iraq increases, force levels decrease.

“Expanding the Coalition. Even if a UNSCR is secured in good time, we will enter Phase IV with few, if any, additional Coalition partners. Moreover IO and NGO support is unlikely to be operating at full capability. This reinforces the critical importance of an authorising UNSCR, allowing the wider internationalisation of our presence in Iraq, and early bilateral engagement by the UK with potential force contributors. In the medium term the UK may have to be prepared to bridge the gap in force levels, maintaining a larger presence over a longer period of time than we would wish ...

“Engagement with US. The UK has no option but to use UK forces initially committed to Phase III for Phase IV. However, accepting our intention to draw down to below medium scale as rapidly as possible – which must be balanced against achieving our wider political objectives in Iraq – the issue of UK responsibilities in Phase IV needs to be concluded with the US. The UK would wish to concentrate in one area of Iraq for ease of command and control and logistic support, this division of responsibility has yet to be agreed formally. Agreement to an AOR would allow planning for Phase IV to be taken forward in confidence.”

541. The Chiefs of Staff were “invited to agree that:

- a. Our linkage with the Iraqis should reflect their system of governance and should thus be arranged on a provincial basis.
- b. UK forces should use the Joint Commission model.
- c. Forces should be deployed on an intelligence-led rather than framework basis ...
- d. COS should take a view on the number of provinces that the UK should control.”

542. More detailed estimates of the forces required to deliver particular tasks in the UK’s potential AOR were included in the 15 April Statement of Requirement (SOR) for South-East Iraq.

543. Sir Kevin Tebbit commented on the reference to Wasit province in the draft Operational Concept:

“Don’t assume we will accept an AOR as defined by the US. It has to be what we can cope with (including other countries we might be able to bring along). What are force level implications?”³³²

544. It is not clear to whom those comments were addressed.

545. The draft Operational Concept was not discussed at the next meeting of the Chiefs of Staff on 26 March.³³³ Comments were to be sent to Lt Gen Reith out of Committee.

546. In his Phase IV military planning guidance, also produced on 25 March, Lieutenant General Anthony Pigott, Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (Commitments) (DCDS(C)), addressed the need to plan for the possibility that UK forces might have to stay in Iraq in greater numbers or for longer than intended.

547. Phase IV planning assumed that levels of consent would rise from “medium” to “high”, while recognising that there were some areas where “low” levels of consent could persist for some time.

³³² [Manuscript comment Tebbit on Minute COSSEC to PSO/CDS, 25 March 2003, ‘OP COS Paper: Subject – Op TELIC – Phase IV Legal Issues’.](#)

³³³ Minutes, 26 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

548. Lt Gen Pigott recommended preparing a strategic estimate for sustaining a large-scale UK presence to March 2004.

549. The second paper sent to the Chiefs of Staff on 25 March was Lt Gen Pigott's draft Phase IV military planning guidance.³³⁴

550. Lt Gen Pigott stated that the MOD approach to Phase IV planning ("integration of top down policy/strategic issues with bottom up operational/tactical realities") "has kept us reasonably balanced in a very uncertain environment".³³⁵ With Phase IV "potentially unfolding from now on", it was time to take stock and update UK military commanders and staff.

551. The guidance outlined the wider strategic context for Phase IV, including the UK's post-conflict objectives and six "Strategic Lines of Operation": disarmament, security, humanitarian effort, political (initial governance and longer-term reconstruction of political institutions), diplomatic and economic.

552. Lt Gen Pigott summarised the US framework for Phase IV:

- Phase IVa (stability), lasting 6, 12 or 18 months under best, moderate or worst case scenarios;
- Phase IVb (recovery), 18 to 24 months;
- Phase IVc (transition), from 24 months.

553. He explained that US command and control for Phase IV was "a very fluid area", had gone through a number of iterations and could be expected to change further.

554. Lt Gen Pigott advised that the scale of the UK military effort in Phase IV would be:

"Informed by operational considerations in the JOA [Joint Operational Area], such as levels of consent but also taking account of wider Commitments, we need to draw down to nearer medium scale of effort by autumn 03."

555. Lt Gen Pigott explained that the UK distinguished between three levels of consent: "High", "Medium (Patchy)" and "Low". These mirrored the US model of best, moderate and worst case scenarios. Current UK thinking assumed "medium (patchy) consent turning to high as the basis for Phase IV planning at this stage but recognises that there will be areas where low consent is more likely, possibly for some time."

³³⁴ [Minute COSSEC to PSO/CDS, 25 March 2003, 'OP COS Paper: Subject – Op TELIC – Phase IV \(Post Conflict\): Military Planning Guidance'](#).

³³⁵ Minute DCDS(C) to COSSEC, 25 March 2003, 'Op TELIC Phase IV (Post Conflict): Military Planning Guidance' attaching Paper [draft] DCDS(C), 25 March 2003, 'Op TELIC Phase IV (Post Conflict): Military Planning Guidance'.

556. Lt Gen Reith listed six components of the UK military's approach to Phase IV:

"a. Phase IV UK Strategy. While our Phase IV contribution will be governed largely by immediate events in theatre, it is essential that our Phases IVb/c contribution is set within a wider 'Ends' driven strategy ...

b. Improved International Support. We need to create the conditions for improved international engagement for Phase IV. An outline strategy has already been developed for this ... While looking for early support in Phase IVa we should not make premature assumptions that it will be easily forthcoming.

c. Early Reduction. (May/Jun 03 tbc). We should identify and be prepared to withdraw at speed (tbc) any capabilities which have Phase III utility only ...

d. Staged Draw Down. (Jun–Sep 03 tbc). We should then plan to draw down the balance of components to the autumn 03 steady state against clear criteria.

e. Enduring Steady State. (Sep 03–Mar 05). Subsequently, we should be prepared to maintain the steady state until at least Spring 04 and scope out to Spring 05.

f. Branch Planning. A strategic estimate should be conducted to consider large scale presence continuing through Mar 04 reducing then to medium scale until Mar 05."

557. Sir Kevin Tebbit commented on the draft Phase IV military planning guidance:

"Creeping larger commitment. I am not clear where the idea of a large scale force until April 04 comes from – as distinct from large scale until the autumn."³³⁶

558. It is not clear to whom Sir Kevin addressed his comments, but he was present when the paper was discussed by the Chiefs of Staff on 26 March.³³⁷

559. The Chiefs of Staff discussed the tensions between the UK's desire to reduce troop levels to a divisional headquarters and one brigade by the autumn, the potential scale of the Phase IV task and US expectations about the size of the UK contribution.

560. Lt Gen Pigott briefed the Chiefs of Staff on his Phase IV planning guidance paper on 26 March.³³⁸

561. ACM Squire commented that Lt Gen Pigott's paper "highlighted the possibility that Phase IV would be a larger political and military task than had been originally envisaged".

³³⁶ [Manuscript comment Tebbit on Minute COSSEC to PSO/CDS, 25 March 2003, 'OP COS Paper: Subject – Op TELIC – Phase IV \(Post Conflict\): Military Planning Guidance'](#).

³³⁷ Minutes, 26 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

³³⁸ Minutes, 26 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

562. Gen Jackson agreed, adding that “the desire to draw down in accordance with departmental assumptions could run counter to the UK’s moral responsibility to Iraq”.

563. The minutes of the meeting recorded that there were “a significant number of Phase IV papers in circulation, with more in prospect”. Adm Boyce instructed Lt Gen Pigott to update the planning guidance and Mr Lee to provide Ministers with a summary of Phase IV issues and progress with planning by 1 April.

564. Mr Drummond briefed Sir David Manning that the Chiefs of Staff discussion had:

“... led on to thinking that Phase IVa might be much longer than expected and the need to consider longer term military options. The Chiefs are still determined to reduce by 10,000 or so by the autumn. (No harm in thinking this through now, but there is a lot that can change ...).”³³⁹

565. Admiral Sir Alan West, Chief of the Naval Staff and First Sea Lord, commented on the draft Operational Concept on 27 March. He registered concern about “mission creep and the possibility of taking on too many provinces bearing in mind the forces available” and requested a discussion in a COS(I) [Chiefs of Staff (Informal)] meeting after a regular meeting of the Chiefs of Staff.³⁴⁰

566. On 28 March, Gen Jackson commented that some of the assumptions in the draft Operational Concept about levels of consent and the extent to which the UK could use the remnants of the Iraqi administration “may have been optimistic”.³⁴¹ The aspiration to draw down to a divisional headquarters and one brigade remained, but “the situation may demand more of us”. He recommended that “we should be prepared to constantly review our assumptions and the deductions they lead to, and we should approach detailed plans with caution until we can be sure they are robust”.

567. The Chiefs of Staff discussed the draft Operational Concept for Phase IV and the size of the UK military contribution to Phase IV, on 31 March.³⁴²

568. In discussion, the Chiefs of Staff commented that Lt Gen McKiernan “had established that the force level requirement for the region would be three manoeuvre brigades and an aviation brigade in reserve, implying a potential UK commitment significantly in excess of ‘a medium scale effort by autumn 03’.” Although operational conditions were likely to be different in each province, “it was likely that any extension of UK responsibility beyond Basra province would only be possible with support from other Coalition partners”.

³³⁹ Minute Drummond to Manning, 26 March 2003, ‘Chiefs Meeting’.

³⁴⁰ Minute NA/1SL to MA/CJO, 27 March 2003, ‘OP TELIC Phase IV – The Joint Commander’s Draft Operational Concept’.

³⁴¹ [Minute MA2/CGS to MA/CJO, 28 March 2003, ‘An Operational Concept for Phase IV’](#).

³⁴² Minutes, 31 March 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

569. The Chiefs of Staff also agreed that the UK should adopt the Joint Commission approach to local government proposed by Lt Gen Reith in the draft Operational Concept.

570. Adm Boyce directed that the draft Operational Concept be amended to reflect the discussion. It should also be circulated to the Chiefs of Staff and UK representatives in the Pentagon and CENTCOM “for use as a vehicle to engage the US”.

571. Adm Boyce also repeated his 26 March request that Mr Lee prepare briefing on Phase IV progress for Mr Hoon.

572. The Inquiry has not seen any record of whether or how the draft Operational Concept was used by UK representatives in the Pentagon and CENTCOM.

573. Sir David Manning was advised on 31 March that there was “likely to be a serious shortfall in military forces for Phase IV and building a coalition to undertake some of these operations is complicated by the absence of a UNSCR”.

574. The Cabinet Office reported to Sir David Manning on 31 March:

“There was some discussion [at the Chiefs of Staff meeting] of whether we should agree to the informal US request to take on four provinces. This would almost certainly require more than the medium level of force that the MOD intend to leave behind in Iraq from the autumn. The difficulty is that there is likely to be a serious shortfall in military forces for Phase IV and building a coalition to undertake some of these operations is complicated by the absence of a UNSCR ... You might want to encourage MOD to share its thinking on force sizes, perhaps at COBR(R) initially, once it has crystallised. In the meantime there is a danger of a rising expectation in Washington that we’ll be able to contribute more than we can manage in Phase IV.”³⁴³

The relationship between the UK military and ORHA

575. In early April, Ministers were advised that ORHA was planning to administer the whole of Iraq and it would therefore not be feasible for 1 (UK) Div to operate autonomously in the UK AOR.

576. Concerns were expressed about the implications, in those circumstances, of differences between US and UK interpretations of the rights and obligations of Occupying Powers.

577. On 31 March, Mr Huw Llewellyn, an FCO Legal Counsellor, reported to Mr Dominick Chilcott, Head of the Iraq Planning Unit (IPU), that UK military lawyers based in Kuwait were becoming alarmed at ORHA’s activities.³⁴⁴ ORHA had issued three

³⁴³ Minute Gibbons to Manning, 31 March 2003, ‘Iraq: COS meeting – Monday 31 March 2003’.

³⁴⁴ Minute Llewellyn to Chilcott, 31 March 2003, ‘Iraq: ORHA: Current Activity’.

orders in relation to the port of Umm Qasr, including the application of US labour and customs laws, for which there was no clear legal authority. The position of UK forces, if asked to participate in related activities, was therefore uncertain.

578. Mr Llewellyn concluded:

“If it cannot be sorted out, we may well need a decision from Ministers about whether UK forces should decline to take part in actions that we consider unauthorised or unlawful.”

579. The IPU sent recommendations on the UK’s future engagement with ORHA to Mr Straw on 1 April.³⁴⁵

580. The IPU advised that the UK objective of an Interim Iraqi Administration (IIA) acting under UN authorisation was unlikely to be in place sooner than 90 days after the end of hostilities.³⁴⁶ Until then, mechanisms were needed to deliver humanitarian assistance and, within the relevant legal constraints, civil administration. Without such mechanisms, those tasks would fall on the military, which had other priorities and limited resources.

581. Because ORHA would administer the whole of Iraq as part of an integrated US-led approach and had large resources at its disposal, it would not be viable for 1 (UK) Div to operate “autonomously” in its AOR:

“We may wish to support 1 Div’s capacity to carry out specific actions (eg repairing the water supply) in areas where we are responsible for maintaining security. But the logic of ORHA – a nation-wide approach to Phase IV – limits the UK’s responsibilities and exposure. Carving out a separate approach in a UK sector would make no sense.”

582. Depending on the circumstances, the UK could quite quickly be faced with “a grey area of possible activities which could move ORHA beyond the UK’s understanding of an Occupying Power’s rights and obligations”.

583. The IPU concluded that, while ORHA was “in many ways a sub-optimal organisation for delivering the UK’s Phase IV objectives”, it was “the only game in town”.

584. Section 9.1 addresses UK concerns about the legality of ORHA activities in Iraq in greater detail.

585. The debate about the scale of the UK contribution to ORHA is addressed in Section 10.1.

³⁴⁵ [Minute IPU to Private Secretary \[FCO\], 1 April 2003, ‘Iraq: ORHA’.](#)

³⁴⁶ [Paper IPU, 28 March 2003, ‘Iraq: Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance \(ORHA\)’.](#)

586. ORHA was discussed at an MOD briefing for Mr Hoon on 1 April.³⁴⁷ Mr Watkins reported that:

“Considerable concern was expressed about the modus operandi of the ORHA: this could cut across the UK Armed Forces’ so far successful ‘hearts and minds work’ within our AO. One possibility would be to invite ORHA to ‘phase in’ their operations within our AO in a controlled way. There would need to be an early conversation between the Secretary of State and Donald Rumsfeld ...”

587. Mr Lee was commissioned to prepare a speaking note for Mr Hoon to use with Secretary Rumsfeld.

588. Mr Lee briefed Mr Hoon on Phase IV issues on 2 April.³⁴⁸ He advised Mr Hoon to note that:

- the Chiefs of Staff had endorsed the draft Operational Concept on 31 March;
- the Joint Commission concept was well tested in the Balkans and would be adapted to the particular circumstances of Iraq;
- levels of consent and Phase IV tasks “remain undetermined and thus the geographic scope of British responsibility cannot yet be decided”; and
- until ORHA’s plans were clearer, particularly in relation to future governance structures, the relationship with ORHA needed to be managed “pragmatically and without long-term commitment”.

589. Mr Lee explained that:

“To a degree, initial ‘Phase IV’ operations have already begun in Iraq with humanitarian assistance and low level civil contacts being conducted by UK forces. There is thus a pressing need to define an operational concept for the employment of UK forces in early Phase IV operations in Iraq ...

“It is, however, early days. The strategic background to Phase IV operations remains uncertain and changeable. Very significant decisions – eg about Iraqi governance and the legal basis for Phase IV operations – remain to be taken. How any ‘Joint Commissions’ will relate to Iraqi governance structures remains undecided: care will be required that their establishment does not prejudice the development of governance structures by ORHA. While acknowledging the merits of the ‘Joint Commission’ model, we also need to be sympathetic to Iraqi culture and wishes. Commanders on the ground are already implementing what has been called a ‘town hall’ process. The key point is that ‘Joint Commissions’ should not become an alien imposition or, in any way, a rival power base to an Interim Authority; their role should be obviously temporary and advisory.

³⁴⁷ [Minute Watkins to Policy Director, 2 April 2003, ‘Iraq: Ministerial Briefing: 1 April 2003’.](#)

³⁴⁸ [Minute Lee to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 2 April 2003, ‘Op TELIC – Draft Operational Concept for Phase 4’ attaching Paper \[unattributed and undated\], ‘Speaking Notes for Call to Rumsfeld on ORHA’.](#)

“The precise tasks that will fall to UK forces in Phase IV remain to be determined. These will depend very largely on the circumstances that obtain at the end of Phase III ... It is thus not possible to make a firm determination of the final geographic scope of UK responsibility that will be possible within the upper scale of effort approved by Ministers. For the moment, planning guidance, based on the ‘Ministerial Guidance’ received refers to a focus in Basra province with extension beyond that dependent on events and Coalition support.”

590. Conditions for ORHA’s deployment were “not yet right at many levels”:

- there was “no prospect” of an early “fourth” resolution endorsing arrangements for post-conflict Iraq;
- the US Department of Defense (DoD) and the State Department had not agreed on the composition of ORHA and the IIA;
- 1 (UK) Div was the de facto authority in most of South-East Iraq, albeit subordinate to the CFLCC, but the relationship between Maj Gen Brims and ORHA was not clear; and
- the pressing tasks were “humanitarian and low-level administration (eg opening schools and hospitals)”; ORHA’s political baggage might be “counterproductive to our efforts to win the confidence of local people”.

591. Mr Lee recommended that, in the light of indications that ORHA might soon move to “an operational and public posture that the UK would find unhelpful”, Mr Hoon should telephone Secretary Rumsfeld to suggest a pragmatic approach to ORHA’s rapidly developing plan to deploy into southern Iraq.

592. The attached speaking notes for Mr Hoon were listed “in increasing order of candour”. They included:

- Struck by the success of ‘local’ and ‘prototyping’ approach we’ve taken to clearing villages and towns (az-Zubayr) while developing situation in Basra.
- Don’t believe the situation is ready in (our bit of) Iraq for all dimensions of ORHA but a ‘toe in the water’ or prototyping with the humanitarian and initial reconstruction elements could be very helpful.
- End state we’re looking for is a supportive high consent population so that we can get forces out and allow Iraqis to run their own affairs; getting the transitional arrangements right is vital for this.
- President and Prime Minister agreed to a ‘softly softly’ approach on the big political questions about Phase IV and the form of UN endorsement and involvement; ORHA big bang would run counter to that.
- Concerned about how it would relate to (destabilise?) our 1 (UK) Div effort.
- ...
- The Iraqis are traumatised and the regional neighbours are suspicious gusting hostile; now is not the time to launch something so politically controversial; let’s win the war first.”

593. Mr Lee's advice was copied to Mr Desmond Bowen, Deputy Head of the Cabinet Office Overseas and Defence Secretariat (OD Sec) and Mr William Ehrman, FCO Director General Defence and Intelligence.

594. Mr Hoon agreed to Mr Lee's recommendations on 3 April, noting that the Chiefs of Staff would "provide advice in due course on the geographical area that UK forces should cover".³⁴⁹

595. Mr Hoon tried without success to engage Secretary Rumsfeld on the question of ORHA during their conversation on 3 April.³⁵⁰

596. Mr Hoon told Secretary Rumsfeld that the oil infrastructure in the South had been secured with very little damage and it was possible that pumping would restart soon. There was no reason why the Coalition could not leave Iraq in a better state than it had found it, but he was "keen not to have British troops tied down in Iraq for too long". UK forces had made good contacts with local municipalities and were introducing the well-trying concept of Joint Commissions. Mr Hoon suggested that ORHA should focus on its humanitarian role and "go cautiously on the political/governmental dimension".

Extension of the UK AO

597. On 7 April, the Chiefs of Staff took the view:

- that the boundaries of any extension of the AO should be clearly defined;
- that the UK should not be over-committed; and
- any move north should be dependent on the successful conclusion of operations in Basra.

598. On 11 April, the UK AO was extended to al-Amara in Maysan province.

599. Lt Gen Reith circulated a revised draft Operational Concept on 4 April. The revised text reflected comments made by the Chiefs of Staff on 31 March and was to be approved out of committee if no further comments were received by 10 April.³⁵¹ The revised draft recommended that:

"Any extension of UK responsibility beyond Basra province should preferably be achieved through support from Coalition partners, who would deploy forces to operate under a UK two-star divisional HQ."

600. The Inquiry has seen no evidence of any further comments on the draft.

³⁴⁹ [Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 3 April 2003, 'Iraq: Draft Operational Concept for Phase 4'](#).

³⁵⁰ [Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 3 April 2003, 'Iraq: Conversation with Rumsfeld: 3 April 2003'](#).

³⁵¹ [Minute SECCOS to PSO/CDS, 4 April 2003, 'OP COS Paper: Subject – Op TELIC Phase 4 – The Joint Commander's Draft Operational Concept' attaching Paper Reith, 3 April 2003, 'Operation TELIC Phase IV: The Joint Commander's Draft Operational Concept'](#).

601. It is not clear precisely when the draft was finalised, but the revised Operational Concept had been agreed by 14 April.³⁵²

602. The Chiefs of Staff were informed on 7 April that Lt Gen McKiernan was considering the use of UK forces to secure the northern Rumaylah oilfields and Route 6 (which ran north from Basra, through al-Amara (in Maysan province) and al-Kut (in Wasit province) to Baghdad).³⁵³ The Chiefs of Staff took the view that the boundaries of any extension to the AO would need to be clearly defined; that the UK should not be over-committed; and that any move north should be dependent on the successful conclusion of operations in Basra.

603. The COBR round-up on 8 April recorded that US forces had been given the task of ensuring the capitulation of al-Amara.³⁵⁴

604. The 9 April round-up reported that US forces had found little resistance and had withdrawn, “leaving a small liaison presence”.³⁵⁵ The round-up also stated that UK forces would “push north toward al-Amara, possibly as early as tomorrow”.

605. By 9 April, 16 Air Assault Brigade had deployed north of Basra to al-Qurnah (15km inside the northern boundary of Basra province), with the Pathfinders (an element of the Parachute Regiment) located 15km further north.³⁵⁶

606. The UK AO was extended north to al-Amara on 11 April, when Pathfinders from 16 Air Assault Brigade entered the city. The remainder of the force entered on 12 April.³⁵⁷

607. On 12 April, in line with the military plan approved by Mr Blair on 14 March (see Section 6.2), Mr Hoon approved the extension of the UK AO to include the whole provinces of Basra and Maysan.

608. Mr Hoon was advised that Lt Gen McKiernan had asked the UK “initially” to take responsibility for two provinces in Phase IV, with the possibility of a request to extend the post-conflict AOR to further provinces in due course.

609. On 12 April, Lt Gen Reith recommended that Mr Hoon approve the extension of the UK AO to include all of Basra and Maysan provinces, “in preparation for Phase IV”.³⁵⁸

610. Mr Hoon was invited to note that:

“a) in line with previous authority,³⁵⁹ CJO plans to move forces to the northern limit of the extended UK Area of Operation, flushing out any Iraqi forces encountered en route;

³⁵² Paper Reith, 14 April 2003, ‘Phase IV Roulement/Recovery of UK Land Forces’.

³⁵³ Minutes, 7 April 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

³⁵⁴ Briefing [MOD], 8 April 2003, ‘Annex to Evening Sitrep 8 April 2003: Military’.

³⁵⁵ Briefing [MOD], 9 April 2003, ‘Annex to Evening Sitrep 9 April 2003: Military’.

³⁵⁶ Minutes, 9 April 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

³⁵⁷ Minutes, 12 April 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

³⁵⁸ [Minute D/PJHQ to PS/Secretary of State \[MOD\], 12 April 2003, ‘Expansion of the UK AOR’.](#)

³⁵⁹ Set out in the 18 March Execute Directive for Op TELIC Phases III and IV.

b) CFLCC has, initially, asked CDS for the UK to initially take responsibility for two provinces of Iraq during Phase IV.”

611. On that basis, Mr Hoon was asked to agree that:

“c) UK forces may exploit further north to take all of the Maysan province into the UK Area of Operations, once al-Amara is secure, allowing GOC 1 Div to begin the process of engaging local leaders in the same way as he has in Basra province and allowing elements of [US] I MEF to be re-allocated to operations in Baghdad.”

612. Lt Gen Reith explained that:

“Given the current progress UK forces have made in Basra, with work beginning to set up conditions for Phase IV, CJO believes that the time is right to be able to release forces northwards ... The US Task Force Tarawa has already explored al-Amara and found that it had been self-liberated and [is] currently stable.

“Once this task is complete, we will wish to begin work to aid reconstruction of the region. Secretary of State should note, that although a final agreement has not been made on the number of provinces that the UK will support during Phase IV, CFLCC has already asked CDS to take responsibility for both Basra and Maysan provinces. Whilst the initial UK AO boundary made operational sense during war-fighting in terms of co-ordination with the US, if the process of reconstruction is to start, it makes sense to include the whole of Maysan province at the earliest opportunity. This will allow locals to become exposed to UK forces, enabling the necessary rapport and trust to be built up ...

“Our assessment of this additional area is that it is relatively quiet and therefore should not add any unmanageable burden on UK forces – the only real resistance has been in al-Kut, further to the north-west. It is on this basis that we wish to seek approval to extend the UK AO as far as the northern Maysan provincial border in advance of any overt Phase IV activity.

“... we may be asked by the US to extend our Area of Responsibility to further provinces in due course.”

613. Lt Gen Reith advised that the UK response to a US request to extend the UK’s AOR would depend on the permissiveness of the areas concerned and the response to requests for additional Coalition members to offer support during reconstruction. The issue was being discussed by the Chiefs of Staff. Further advice would follow.

614. Lt Gen Reith did not address directly the potential risks associated with expansion to two provinces that had been raised during initial discussion of the extension of the UK AO in early March (see Section 6.2). Those risks included the possible consequences for other parts of government.

615. Mr Hoon agreed Lt Gen Reith's recommendation to take the whole of Maysan province into the UK AO once al-Amara was secure.³⁶⁰

616. Mr Hoon also noted the US request to Adm Boyce for the UK to take responsibility for Basra and Maysan provinces during Phase IV. Mr Hoon expected to discuss the UK's Phase IV AOR with Secretary Rumsfeld on 15 April.

617. Mr Watkins informed Mr Lee that Mr Hoon wanted an initial discussion of the US request "to head up a division" during Phase IV on the morning of 14 April, before Secretary Rumsfeld's call.³⁶¹ Mr Watkins wrote:

"This [US] approach is not, of course, entirely unexpected and Mr Hoon will wish to give an encouraging – if not necessarily definitive – response. It would therefore be helpful if the following preparatory work could be set in hand:

- Informal soundings of the US over the weekend on the likely nature of the request (ie when, for how long, where?) and how it fits with wider US thinking (total number of divisions?).
- Initial assumptions on the extent of likely contributions from other countries to a UK-led division.
- Initial assessment of the feasibility of the task and its implications for other commitments.
- Any conditions (or counter-requests) that we should attach to our taking on this task. (As with the ISAF in Kabul, presumably we would want assurances of ... support from the US.)"

618. Dr Simon Cholerton, Acting Head of the MOD Iraq Secretariat, replied on 13 April.³⁶² He advised that:

"US thinking ... on when, how long and where remains immature. But we expect a six-month period, beginning in the summer, will be the focus, with the UK AOR ... in SE Iraq. The US are looking for the UK to head a division operating around four provinces, with UK forces covering two provinces and the remainder being dealt with [by] Coalition partners ...

"UK thinking ... The current working assumption is that we should scale down our contribution to a division HQ and a brigade, as soon as this is feasible, but by September. This could then be maintained until spring 2004. Work is in hand now to scope our potential contribution until spring 2005. But the question is not simply one of what force levels are available, but what tasks those forces are expected to carry out. This requires further work. It may, for example, be possible to establish a model based on gendarmerie security forces, confining the military to more specialist areas

³⁶⁰ [Minute Watkins to CJO, 12 April 2003, 'Iraq: Expansion of the UK AOR'](#).

³⁶¹ [Minute Watkins to DG Op Pol, 12 April 2003, 'Iraq: Phase IV'](#).

³⁶² Minute Cholerton to PS/SofS [MOD], 13 April 2003, 'Iraq: Phase IV Coalition'.

such as dealing with EOD [Explosive Ordnance Disposal] and WMD, together with continued military operations to root out ongoing resistance and security threats.

“Potential Contributions to UK-led Division. We have begun the ‘bottom-up’ process of sounding out potential Coalition partners ... but this has so far not produced many firm or militarily significant offers ...

“UK conditions. In the absence of an agreed set of tasks, and knowledge of Coalition contributions, the level of support we will require from US is difficult to determine. The aim should be for Coalition partners to be as self-sustaining as possible, but outside established European partners, this is difficult to conceive. In most scenarios we can say therefore that we shall need support from US or Coalition partners in areas such as medical support, engineering, support helicopters, logistics and reconnaissance. Politically, we also need to bottom out the ‘vital role’ for the UN.”

619. Adm Boyce informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 14 April that the military campaign was coming to an end.³⁶³ Consideration was being given to the security management of the post-conflict phase, where the UK Division might take charge of two provinces and supervise a further two with other troops joining the Coalition for that purpose.

620. Adm Boyce’s other points are set out earlier in this Section.

621. On 14 April, Lt Gen Reith recommended to the Chiefs of Staff that the UK AOR should be “based on” Basra and Maysan provinces.

622. Expansion into other provinces should be subject to extra Coalition support and a US request.

623. Levels of consent in the South-East were expected to rise from “medium” to “high” as Phase IV progressed, but would be kept under review.

624. Lt Gen Reith recommended to the Chiefs of Staff on 14 April that:

- the UK AOR should be “based on” Basra and Maysan provinces;
- with a divisional headquarters deployed, the UK had the potential to expand the AOR to include two other provinces, “probably Dhi Qar and Wasit, subject to Coalition support, and a US request”;
- “operational situation permitting”, the Chiefs of Staff should approve the early extraction of land forces “needed for roulement [the rotation of combat units] in the mid-term”.³⁶⁴

625. Lt Gen Reith explained that, because most troops had deployed between January and March and fighting had continued for several weeks in demanding environmental

³⁶³ Minutes, 14 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

³⁶⁴ Paper Reith, 14 April 2003, ‘Phase 4 – Roulement/Recovery of UK Land Forces’.

conditions, the Chiefs of Staff had “directed PJHQ to recover deployed formations, where possible, before the summer”. It remained the UK’s strategic intent “to draw down to nearer a medium scale of effort – a Div[isional] HQ and a B[riga]de – by Autumn 03”, sufficient to run two provinces, but there was a clear US expectation that the UK would take responsibility for up to two more provinces “as the Coalition grows”.

626. Lt Gen Reith warned that, without a UN mandate and with few nations able to generate forces quickly, the UK “should not plan on substantial early Coalition augmentation of UK resources”. He also advised that the level of Iraqi consent in the South-East was “assumed to be medium (patchy) turning to high as Phase IV develops”, but would be kept under review. A brigade of four battlegroups would be needed to perform the military tasks anticipated in the two provinces and to provide a secure environment for other activities.

627. The Inquiry has seen no record of a meeting to discuss the UK AOR chaired by Mr Hoon in the MOD on 14 April, but speaking notes for Mr Hoon’s conversation with Secretary Rumsfeld were prepared on 14 April.

The military Statement of Requirement for a UK AOR

628. In the military Statement of Requirement (SOR) for a UK AOR, Lt Gen Reith:

- **estimated the force requirements for six provinces that might form part of the UK AOR, all on the assumption that levels of consent would continue to rise;**
- **recommended that the UK “should not assume responsibility for more than two provinces until additional and appropriate Coalition Forces are deployed. This needs formal US/UK agreement”;** and
- **advised that the SOR might need to change, but was “a starting point for discussion with potential troop contributing nations”.**

629. The SOR did not directly address two issues raised in the Phase IV planning guidance and the Concept of Operations with strategic implications for the UK’s commitment in the South:

- **the risk that low levels of consent might persist for some time in certain areas; and**
- **the scale of the post-conflict task, in particular the steps, military and non-military, needed to secure high levels of Iraqi consent.**

630. Adm Boyce concluded that “urgent clarification” of the potential requirement for the UK to take responsibility for four provinces was needed.

631. Lt Gen Reith sent a first version of the SOR for a UK AOR to the Chiefs of Staff on 15 April.³⁶⁵ He explained that:

- the Chiefs of Staff had already been asked to agree that “the initial UK AOR” should be “based on” Basra and Maysan provinces;
- with the deployment of a divisional headquarters and the “probability of additional Coalition troops”, the UK had the potential to expand the AOR to include two other provinces;
- the additional provinces would probably be Dhi Qar and Wasit, but that had not been agreed formally with Lt Gen McKiernan;
- the UK “should not plan on substantial early Coalition augmentation”;
- the US had accepted that it should “hold the risk” in areas of potential UK responsibility while waiting for the Coalition force to grow, but there was no formal agreement with the US on the issue; and
- initial discussions had begun with some countries, but all “desire to know where they will be asked to operate and the forces required”.

632. Lt Gen Reith advised that the UK “should not assume responsibility for more than two provinces until additional and appropriate Coalition Forces are deployed. This needs formal US/UK agreement”.

633. In the SOR, Lt Gen Reith set out estimated force requirements for Basra, Maysan and the four other provinces that might be included in an extended UK AOR:

- Basra: a brigade HQ and three battlegroups with appropriate integral Combat Support (CS) and Combat Service Support (CSS);
- Maysan (grouped with Basra): a single battlegroup, supported by a Formation/ Light Reconnaissance (FR) Company;
- Wasit: a brigade HQ and two battlegroups with appropriate CS and CSS;
- Dhi Qar: a brigade HQ and two battlegroups with appropriate CS and CSS;
- Diyala: a brigade HQ and three battlegroups with appropriate CS and CSS;
- Muthanna: a brigade HQ and one battlegroup supported by an FR Company with appropriate CS and CSS.

634. Lt Gen Reith explained that the SOR offered “a starting point for discussion with potential troop contributing nations”. It was “early days”:

“... Coalition Forces do not yet fully control all areas in SE Iraq. Thus, the SOR may change and we will need to remain flexible. Much will depend on detailed ground reconnaissance and the GOC’s intent.”

³⁶⁵ [Minute Reith to PSO/CDS, 15 April 2003, ‘The Statement of Requirement \(SOR\) for SE Iraq’.](#)

635. Lt Gen Reith recommended that there were “logistic advantages” in including Dhi Qar as the third province if the UK AOR were expanded. Wasit and Muthanna were the likely options for the fourth. Muthanna was “mostly desert ... undemanding and potentially unrewarding, although it includes the area of a potential oilfield”. It was the “simpler task, requiring less troops”. Wasit was “more demanding, requires more troops, but offers a significant role”. Lt Gen Reith advised that: “On the basis of logistic complexity and concern over long term consent levels, Diyala is the only province of the six that the UK should actively seek to avoid.”

636. The SOR included one-page summaries of conditions in each of the six provinces, including assessments of “residual threats” and level of consent:

- Wasit. “A medium-term threat from small groups of irregulars will continue to exist whilst they have any residual support from the local civilian population. As the restructuring work post-war gains momentum and law and order and governmental institutes begin to function again, expect this threat to diminish ... **Low-High levels of consent**. Revenge and retribution between communities potentially high; large Sunni population.”
- Basra. “Iranian-backed/influenced groups will continue to try to exert influence in the region; this is expected to be a short- to medium-term threat. The extent of threat from PMF [Popular Mobilisation Forces] will be influenced by the tolerance of the community; as confidence in the Coalition’s presence builds this threat is expected to diminish ... **High level of consent**. Strong economy with potential for rapid growth. Anti-regime. Border province – Iranian influence.”
- Maysan. “Aside from small groups of irregulars, expect a relatively low level of residual threat in this governorate. As for other areas, the ability of these groups to continue to influence and to blend in with the civilian population will diminish as the post-war reconstruction gathers momentum ... **Medium-High levels of consent**. Tensions between MEK [Mujahideen e Khalq] and local population high. Border province – Iranian influence. Tribes are anti-regime.”
- Dhi Qar. “Aside from small groups of irregulars, we expect a relatively low level of residual threat in this governorate. As for other areas, the ability of these groups to continue to influence and to blend in with the civilian population will diminish as the post-war reconstruction gathers momentum ... **Medium-High levels of consent**. Poor region. Tribal insurrection since 1991. Tensions between MEK and local population high.”
- Muthanna. “A largely benign area of Iraq which is sparsely populated and bordered by Saudi Arabia. There is a possibility that the long-running border dispute with the Saudis could re-emerge in the aftermath of the war, but this is unlikely to pose a direct threat to Coalition activities. That aside, we assess that there is no discernible threat, residual or otherwise to Coalition Forces ... **High levels of consent**.”

- Diyala. “One MEK camp is located north of Baqubah; the current status of the camp is unknown. There is liable to be a degree of Iranian influence due to the proximity of the border, but Shia does not dominate the ethnic mixture in this region, thus any influence exerted by the Iranians will be limited. It is assessed that there is no discernible residual threat to Coalition Forces ... **Medium level of consent.**”

637. The Chiefs of Staff discussed the UK AOR on 15 April.³⁶⁶ Lt Gen Pigott stated that it was anticipated that the UK would be asked to administer Basra and Maysan provinces, “together with two-star supervision of two further provinces, probably Wasit and Dhi Qar or Diyala”.

638. Adm Boyce concluded that: “The potential requirement for the UK commitment to extend to four provinces needed urgent clarification.”

639. Sir David Manning was informed that, on the basis of emerging levels of consent, the Chiefs of Staff believed that a divisional headquarters and a brigade of four battlegroups could look after Basra and Maysan provinces and, subject to Coalition support, supervise two additional provinces.

640. Mr Bowen summarised the discussion for Sir David Manning:

“The general idea is to provide a divisional headquarters and a brigade (of four battlegroups). On the basis of the emerging level of consent in southern Iraq, they believe that this brigade could look after, in security terms, the provinces of Basra and Maysan. The divisional headquarters would enable the British to supervise two additional provinces, provided two brigades’ worth of troops (and two headquarters) were made available by either the Americans or other Coalition partners ...

“There was some debate about which other provinces it was reasonable to assume security responsibility for ... There was concern that the civilian boundaries of ORHA might not coincide with those of the military structure ... Some of this will become clearer after Mr Hoon speaks to Mr Rumsfeld today.”³⁶⁷

641. The speaking note prepared for Mr Hoon’s conversation with Secretary Rumsfeld suggested that Mr Hoon state:

- We [the UK] are assuming that we will reduce to a Divisional HQ and one brigade in Iraq by July/August, if possible. Very difficult to imagine we could offer more.
- We need clear understanding of envisaged requirement for July and beyond – not just troop numbers, but what is the task and the concept? How many provinces do you want us to cover?”³⁶⁸

³⁶⁶ Minutes, 15 April 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting.

³⁶⁷ [Minute Bowen to Manning, 15 April 2003, ‘Chiefs of Staff Meeting: 15 April’](#).

³⁶⁸ Paper MOD, 14 April 2003, ‘Phone Call with Donald Rumsfeld: Phase 4’.

642. Mr Watkins' record of the conversation between Mr Hoon and Secretary Rumsfeld on 15 April stated that, as expected, Secretary Rumsfeld had said he was approaching the UK and Poland to ask if each could lead a division in Phase IV.³⁶⁹ In response:

“Mr Hoon said that we were aiming to reduce our forces in Iraq to one divisional headquarters and one brigade by the late summer. The balance [perhaps two brigades] would need to be provided by other countries ... Mr Hoon pointed out that, for constitutional reasons, a number of countries needed some form of UN cover before they could deploy major contingents.”

Alignment of the UK AOR with ORHA's southern region

643. In early April, Mr Blair approved the creation of a new Cabinet committee, chaired by Mr Straw, to formulate UK policy for post-conflict Iraq.

644. Shortly afterwards, Ministers considered the need to align military sectors and ORHA regions.

645. The UK remained concerned that US policy in Iraq would not be consistent with the UK's understanding of the rights and responsibilities of an Occupying Power.

646. In early April, Mr Blair agreed that a new Cabinet committee should be established “to formulate policy for the rehabilitation, reform and development of Iraq”.³⁷⁰ Mr Straw would chair; other members would be the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Defence Secretary, the International Development Secretary and the Trade and Industry Secretary.

647. The committee would be supported by a group of officials, chaired by Mr Bowen.

648. Mr Straw chaired the first meeting of the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq Rehabilitation (AHMGIR) on 10 April.³⁷¹ The meeting agreed that the UK should increase its support to ORHA.

649. The creation of the AHMGIR and Mr Straw's responsibilities as Chair are addressed in Section 10.1.

650. On 15 April, Mr Straw recommended to Mr Blair that the UK should significantly increase its political and practical support to ORHA.³⁷² Mr Straw explained that the US's intention was:

“... that ORHA will oversee the Phase IV humanitarian and reconstruction effort and restore normal functioning of Iraqi ministries and provinces, with the aim of phased

³⁶⁹ Letter Watkins to Manning, 15 April 2003, 'Iraq: Conversation with Rumsfeld'.

³⁷⁰ Letter Turnbull to Straw, 7 April 2003, 'Iraq: Rehabilitation'.

³⁷¹ Minutes, 10 April 2003, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

³⁷² [Letter Straw to Prime Minister, 15 April 2003, 'Iraq: Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance \(ORHA\)'](#).

restoration of full control of government to the Iraqis themselves ... The US also envisage the establishment of ORHA 'regional offices' in the provinces."

651. Mr Straw advised that "whatever its shortcomings, ORHA will be the essential element in the ability of the Coalition to carry its military successes into the post-conflict phase".

652. Sir David Manning advised Mr Blair that the UK should take responsibility for ORHA's regional office in the area for which the UK military had responsibility.

653. Mr Blair took the view that the UK should take a regional lead in ORHA, unless a scoping study determined that was impossible.

654. On 16 April, the AHMGIR, chaired in Mr Straw's absence by Mr Hoon, commissioned advice on whether the UK should lead one of ORHA's regional offices.³⁷³

655. In response, Mr Drummond chaired a meeting of officials, after which he sent Sir David Manning an IPU paper recommending that the UK defer making a commitment until a scoping study had been carried out to determine the practical implications (see Section 10.1).³⁷⁴

656. The IPU paper reported that the US had not yet decided on the number of ORHA regional offices. One possibility was a four region structure consisting of Baghdad, northern and eastern border provinces, central Iraq and southern Iraq.

657. The UK remained concerned that US policy in Iraq would not be consistent with the UK's understanding of the rights and responsibilities of an Occupying Power. If a UK-led ORHA region included within it areas occupied by US forces, the UK would have legal responsibility for their actions but no practical way to control them.

658. The IPU advised that the UK therefore needed to decide whether in principle it wanted to lead a regional office covering a region coterminous with that in which 1 (UK) Div was responsible for maintaining security. If Ministers wanted to pursue that option, a number of fundamental questions needed urgent answers, including how the UK-led regional office would relate to UK forces.

659. Sir David Manning advised Mr Blair:

"I think you will have to give firm direction. My own view is that we should accept the risks and lead a regional office to cover area for which we have military responsibility."³⁷⁵

³⁷³ Minutes, 16 April 2003, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

³⁷⁴ [Minute Drummond to Manning, 16 April 2003, 'Iraq: Support for ORHA Regional Office' attaching Paper IPU, 16 April 2003, 'Iraq: ORHA Regional Offices'](#).

³⁷⁵ [Manuscript comment Manning to Prime Minister on Minute Drummond to Manning, 16 April 2003, 'Iraq: Support for ORHA Regional Office'](#).

660. Mr Blair chaired the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 17 April.³⁷⁶ He concluded that ORHA:

“... was important in getting Iraq back on its feet. We should have influence inside it. He was sympathetic to the British taking a regional lead in the Office, and wanted the scoping study completed quickly so that final decisions could be made on our participation.”

661. Mr Rycroft wrote to Mr Simon McDonald, Mr Straw’s Principal Private Secretary, later that day to confirm Mr Blair’s view that the UK should increase support for ORHA and that it should take on responsibility for an ORHA regional office “unless the scoping study concludes that this is impossible”.³⁷⁷

662. The realignment of UK forces for the transition from Phase III to Phase IV began in mid-April 2003.

663. On 17 April, Adm Boyce informed Ministers that Coalition Forces were deploying to five post-conflict divisional areas, including a “British area”.

664. The UK continued to seek clarification from CENTCOM on the boundaries of the UK AOR.

665. On 18 April, Adm Boyce and Lt Gen McKiernan agreed that, if at all possible, Iraqi regions, military sectors and ORHA regions should be coterminous.

666. On 16 April, Mr Johnson updated Mr Hoon on plans for the drawdown and roulement of forces for Phase IV.³⁷⁸ Mr Johnson explained that:

“The realignment of forces for Phase IV will need to be a dynamic process and kept under review, and we will provide further advice to the Secretary of State as necessary ... [C]urrent indications are that the US would like the UK to cover two provinces, and – subject to the availability of suitable Coalition partners – to supervise two more. The precise requirement for forces that this arrangement would generate is still being established, but in broad terms, it should enable us to draw down from three manoeuvre brigades to one. To maintain this level of commitment, it will be necessary for some force elements currently in theatre to be withdrawn, subsequently to re-deploy as part of the roulement process.”

667. Adm Boyce informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 17 April that US forces were deploying into their post-conflict divisional areas. There would be five such areas, including “the British area”. US forces would be withdrawn where possible, “just as the

³⁷⁶ Minutes, 17 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

³⁷⁷ [Letter Rycroft to McDonald, 17 April 2003, ‘Iraq: ORHA’](#).

³⁷⁸ Minute Johnson to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 16 April 2003, ‘Iraq: realignment of UK forces for Phase IV’.

British were doing”. In the South, UK forces were working in Joint Commissions to get town councils back in operation and people back to work. The restoration of the southern oilfields was also in hand.³⁷⁹

668. Gen Franks met Adm Boyce in London on 18 April to discuss the timing of the announcement of transition from Phase III to Phase IV.³⁸⁰ The meeting included “a lengthy discussion about the allocation of regions, provinces and sectors”. Gen Franks and Adm Boyce agreed that, if at all possible, Iraqi regions, military sectors and ORHA regions should be coterminous.

669. Lt Gen Reith advised the Chiefs of Staff that many of the civilian tasks emerging in the UK AOR were outside the normal competence of the military.

670. He stated that there was a threat to the credibility of the UK if no “overarching national direction” was given to non-military tasks.

671. Lt Gen Reith took stock of Phase IV planning in a minute to the Chiefs of Staff and MOD officials on 22 April.³⁸¹ With Phase III “war-fighting” being replaced in Phase IV by “the requirement to administer Iraq in the broadest sense”, it was becoming clear that many issues arising in the UK AO were “outside the normal competence of the MOD in general and of PJHQ in particular”.

672. Lt Gen Reith advised:

“The position in the UK AO is now sufficiently developed that direction is required on a whole variety of Civil/Military affairs ... As ORHA is not yet in a position to give such direction, there is a significant risk that momentum will be lost, leaving the UK vulnerable to charges that it has been unable to turn military success into coherent governance. The implications for UK standing with the Iraqi population and the international community, not to mention for the Prime Minister’s required exemplary performance are potentially very serious.

“At present the MOD is the only UK government department actively engaged in Iraq. It is clear ... that many of the issues now facing Iraq in general and the UK AO in particular, are not military tasks and sit more comfortably with other government and non-government agencies. There is currently no overarching national direction being applied to ensure such organisations are actively or usefully engaged to deal with these issues ...

“The Iraqi community is beginning to make it clear that it feels that the military has completed its task. What they want now is long term non-military assistance in rebuilding their infrastructure.”

³⁷⁹ Minutes, 17 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

³⁸⁰ Minute PSO/CDS to PS/SofS, 18 April 2003, ‘Op TELIC: Gen Franks Call on CDS – 18 Apr 2003’.

³⁸¹ [Minute Reith to PSO/CDS, 22 April 2003, ‘Development of UK Policy for Op TELIC Phase IV’.](#)

673. Lt Gen Reith recommended that “cross-governmental support” be sought to deal with the range of outstanding tasks and that:

“... a ‘No.10 Special Unit for the Reconstruction of Iraq’ be established. This unit should be headed by a high calibre, lateral thinking, nationally recognised individual, with the ability to galvanise and draw upon the huge and diverse reserves of UK talent, know-how and finance which exist. As yet these reserves have not been brought to bear and it is beyond the capability of PJHQ to do so.”

674. The Chiefs of Staff discussed the size of the UK AOR on 22 April.³⁸² CENTCOM was expected to respond to a UK request for clarification of the extent of the UK Phase IV AOR by 26 April. It was likely to have Basra and Maysan provinces at its core, together with Dhi Qar and Muthanna, an area coincident with an ORHA region. There was also “a possibility that the UK’s success in attracting Coalition partners would result in a fifth province being added”.

675. Adm Boyce reiterated the importance of the boundaries of the UK AOR matching an ORHA region, whatever the outcome. He also directed Lieutenant General Andrew Ridgway, Chief of Defence Intelligence, to brief the Chiefs of Staff on “the key geopolitical issues associated with each of the provinces within the potential UK AOR”.

676. The DIS report on the provinces in the UK AOR was produced on 28 April and is described later in this Section.

677. Gen Jackson informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 23 April that UK forces considered the South to be “secure”. The roulement of UK forces was “likely to start in June, providing difficulties relating to the commitment of troops to deal with potential fire fighters’ strikes were overcome”.³⁸³

678. On 24 April, against the background of indications that a number of potential Coalition partners were considering offering military contributions, Ministers endorsed the assumption that the UK AOR would comprise four provinces, subject to the permissiveness of the environment and other nations’ contributions.

679. Mr Watkins informed No.10 on 23 April that there were “Encouraging signs of interest from potential Coalition partners”, including Italy, which had secured parliamentary approval for deployment of a brigade headquarters, one battalion, 400–500 Carabinieri and a number of specialist capabilities.³⁸⁴ Taken together, offers of contributions provided a promising basis for a UK-led multilateral division and might

³⁸² Minutes, 22 April 2003, Chiefs of Staff meeting,

³⁸³ Minutes, 23 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

³⁸⁴ Letter Watkins to Cannon, 23 April 2003, ‘Iraq: Phase IV Contributions and Coalition-building’.

produce some surplus capability. Multilateral meetings were scheduled on 30 April and 8 May to take things forward.

680. Mr Watkins advised that discussions with the US on the size of the UK AOR were continuing:

“The US aspire for us to supervise an additional two provinces, probably Dhi Qar and Muthanna (the latter now seems more likely than Wasit), although we have stressed the need to ensure that our area is coterminous with an ORHA region. Each additional province will need to be covered by a brigade headquarters, although both provinces, in particular Muthanna, should be manageable with much less than a full brigade’s worth of military capability.”

681. Adm Boyce advised the 24 April meeting of the AHMGIR that the US planned to divide Iraq into five sectors.³⁸⁵ The UK would lead one sector, comprising four provinces in south-eastern Iraq. That was “manageable ... provided that other countries offered troops to work with us”. The UK could take on a fifth province “if others contributed the necessary forces for it”. The southern region of ORHA would follow the boundaries of the UK’s sector.

682. Ministers agreed that “the size of the UK military sector will depend on the permissiveness of the environment and the extent of other nations’ contributions, but the current assumption was that it would comprise four, or possibly five provinces in the South”. The MOD was instructed to report progress at the next meeting.

683. When Ministers endorsed the assumption that the UK AOR would comprise four provinces coterminous with the southern region of ORHA, they did so against the background of continuing concern about civilian-military co-ordination, ORHA’s capabilities and the implications of both for the achievement of the UK’s objectives in Iraq.

684. As Chief of the Defence Staff, it was Adm Boyce’s responsibility to ensure that military advice on the UK AOR was based on robust analysis of the military’s ability and capacity to meet the UK’s likely obligations to provide security and maintain law and order in the South, taking full account of the wider strategic implications and contingent liabilities.

685. Adm Boyce’s advice to the AHMGIR on 24 April on the size of the UK AOR was given at a time of considerable uncertainty in UK policy towards ORHA. It is not clear that his advice took account of the possible impact on the military’s capacity to support the UK’s potential obligations in the South should the UK decide to engage more actively in ORHA.

³⁸⁵ Minutes, 24 April 2003, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

686. There is no indication that Mr Blair or Ministers sought or received further advice on:

- the geographical extent of the UK AOR;
- the implications of the assumption that the boundaries of AOR should be coterminous with an ORHA region; or
- the UK’s contingency plan for responding to a less permissive environment.

687. The Inquiry has seen no evidence that Ministers took a formal decision on the geographical extent of the UK AOR before the establishment of Multi-National Division (South-East) (MND(SE)) on 12 July 2003.

688. Ministers approved 19 April as “R Day”, when recovery, roulement and redeployment activity formally commenced.³⁸⁶

689. On 21 April, Secretary Rumsfeld cancelled the deployment of 50,000 additional US combat troops scheduled to arrive in Iraq shortly and ordered the withdrawal of the 3rd Infantry Division as soon as 1 (UK) Div arrived.³⁸⁷

690. *Hard Lessons*, Mr Stuart Bowen’s account, as US Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction, of the US experience of reconstruction between 2002 and 2008, described the impact:

“Rumsfeld’s decision shocked some commanders on the ground, including CFLCC Commander Lieutenant General McKiernan, who were counting on the additional manpower to provide a secure environment for post-conflict stabilization. The reversal also dumbfounded McKiernan’s CFLCC staff, that had just sat through two video conferences with senior Pentagon officials who had affirmed the decision to continue deploying forces. [The Head of ORHA, US Lieutenant General (Retired) Jay] Garner called Rumsfeld and said, ‘You’ve got to stop this. You can’t pull troops out. In fact, we probably need more right now.’”

691. The UK AO was declared “permissive”, first by UK forces on 22 April,³⁸⁸ and a few days later by the UN Security Co-ordinator.³⁸⁹

692. On 24 April, PJHQ sought Mr Hoon’s approval of the first substantial withdrawal of ground troops from Iraq with effect from Sunday 27 April.³⁹⁰ The briefing explained that:

- of the 3,500 troops who would return, about 1,500 personnel were due to redeploy to Iraq as part of future Phase IV operations;

³⁸⁶ Report Burrige to CJO, 8 May 2003, ‘NCC Operation TELIC Hauldown Report’.

³⁸⁷ Bowen SW Jr. *Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience*. U.S. Government Printing Office, 2009.

³⁸⁸ Briefing [MOD], 23 April 2003, ‘Iraq: Update for the Number 10 Sitrep – As at 0630 on 23 April 2003’.

³⁸⁹ Written evidence to the Select Committee on Defence, 16 March 2004, *Further Memorandum from the Ministry of Defence on post conflict issues*, February 2004, HC 57-III.

³⁹⁰ Minute Wallace to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 24 April 2003, ‘Op TELIC: Realignment of UK Forces’.

- a further 1,000 were “required in the UK as soon as possible for other reasons”; and
- a further 1,000 were “staff officers and other support personnel deployed for the war fighting phase ... [whose] jobs are now redundant”.

693. Mr Watkins commented to Mr Hoon that, although he, Mr Hoon, had been told about the proposed drawdown “in very broad outline” in an earlier briefing:

“... what is now proposed involves an acceleration by about a week and a reordering. (It is also something of a bounce.) While it is right and proper to bring people back when they are not needed, we do need to be careful not to leave the impression that we are rushing for the exit leaving chaos behind; queering our pitch with Coalition contributors for Phase IV ...”³⁹¹

694. Mr Watkins suggested to Mr Hoon that he might want to defer taking a final view on this until he had spoken to the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr Prescott) about plans for Operation FRESCO³⁹² and had received further details from PJHQ explaining the rationale for the accelerated drawdown.

695. In late April, Lt Gen McKiernan asked the UK to take responsibility for five provinces.

696. Lt Gen Reith stated that the UK’s response would depend on the extent of other nations’ contributions.

697. Lt Gen Reith visited the UK AO in Iraq from 24 to 28 April. During the visit, Gen Franks requested that the UK occupy five southern provinces: Basra, Muthanna, Maysan, Dhi Qar and Wasit.³⁹³ Lt Gen Reith responded that:

“UK resources would only populate Basra and Maysan and if we could only populate two further provinces with other nations’ contributions then we would only take responsibility for four ... [Lt Gen Reith] would expect that ORHA boundaries be adjusted to ensure all five provinces would be in one ORHA region if we took a fifth on.”

698. ACM Squire informed the Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq on 28 April that security in the South continued to improve. A meeting of future troop contributors would take place in London on 1 May.³⁹⁴

³⁹¹ Manuscript comment Watkins to Hoon on Minute Wallace to PS/Secretary of State [MOD], 24 April 2003, ‘Op TELIC: Realignment of UK Forces’.

³⁹² The use of military forces to provide cover in the event of a strike by the Fire Brigades’ Union.

³⁹³ Minute MA/CJO to PSO/CDS, 28 April 2003, ‘CJO visit report to TELIC AO 24-28 April’.

³⁹⁴ Minutes, 28 April 2003, Ad Hoc Meeting on Iraq.

699. The DIS produced an assessment of Basra, Maysan, Dhi Qar, Muthanna and Wasit provinces on 28 April.³⁹⁵ The paper stated that:

- the overwhelming majority of tribes welcomed the overthrow of Saddam Hussein, but some remained suspicious of Coalition intentions;
- there was potential for inter-tribal conflict between pro- and anti-regime tribes, but traditional tribal enmity in the UK AOR was “unlikely to be destabilising”;
- a number of religious leaders were vying for influence over the Shia population, although most local clerics in the UK AOR were believed to be followers of Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani;
- there was strong evidence that Iranian-backed groups were attempting to increase their influence in southern Iraq; and
- further outbreaks of violence were likely as Shia factions attempted to gain political and social influence.

700. The DIS advised that there was insufficient detail available for a complete picture of Iraq infrastructure. It assessed that:

- Four airfields in the UK AOR, including Basra Airport, were being cleared of obstructions; the remaining 16 would require “varying but significant effort” to restore full operating capability.
- Major clearance operations were needed in the Shatt al-Arab waterway before Basra would be available for major port operations.
- Roads were “generally in good condition”.
- There were no reports of damage to railways.
- Telecommunications and broadcasting networks were in “various stages of degradation”.
- Little southern oil infrastructure had been damaged during Op TELIC, but most facilities had ground to a halt.
- Damage during the 1991 Gulf Conflict and subsequent lack of maintenance had reduced electricity generation and transmission to 40–50 percent of capacity. Power cuts continued to be “widespread and prolonged”. There might be additional problems with transmission caused by conflict damage to power lines.
- The water and sewerage system had been severely degraded by the Gulf Conflict, poor maintenance and problems caused by sanctions; 60 percent of the water distribution system for Basra had been restored, but sewage treatment plants were “barely functioning”. It was doubtful that a reliable service could be restored without “extensive investment of money, time and equipment”.

³⁹⁵ [Minute PS/CDI to APS/SofS \[MOD\], 28 April 2003, ‘A Study of the Provinces within the UK AOR’ attaching Paper \[unattributed\], 28 April 2003, ‘General Assessment of Provinces within UK AOR’.](#)

- Pre-conflict shortages of medical supplies had been aggravated by looting. NGOs had restored stocks to most major hospitals, but there remained the problem of persuading health professionals to return to their posts.

701. Separate assessments of the five provinces provided more detail, but all with the caveat that information on the region remained limited. Information on Muthanna and Wasit provinces was particularly sparse.

702. No assessment was made of the comparative advantage of including particular provinces in the UK AOR.

703. In a statement to Parliament on 30 April, Mr Hoon announced that:

“Decisive combat operations in Iraq are now complete, and Coalition Forces are increasingly focusing upon stabilisation tasks. It will therefore be possible to make further force level adjustments over the coming weeks while continuing to meet our responsibilities to the Iraqi people.”³⁹⁶

704. In addition to the substantial withdrawal of Royal Navy and RAF personnel and many of the Army war-fighting units, Mr Hoon explained that he had extended the tour of one unit to enable it “to continue in their key role of ensuring security in the region of Zubayr”. He concluded that:

“While details continue to be clarified, we envisage that by mid-May 25,000–30,000 UK Service personnel will remain deployed in the Gulf region, continuing to fulfil our responsibilities towards the Iraqi people. The planned replacement of forces is clear evidence of our commitment to them.

“Our aim is to leave an Iraq that is confident, secure and fully integrated with the international community. The planning process to establish the precise level of the continuing UK presence needed to achieve this aim is a dynamic one, and is kept under review. We will also need to take account of the contributions of Coalition partners. We will continue to withdraw assets and personnel from the region where possible, but we will maintain an appropriate military presence for as long as necessary.”

705. On 1 May, President Bush declared major combat operations in Iraq to have ended (see Section 9.1).

706. Cabinet was told on 1 May that British troops had done an excellent job in restoring security in the South of Iraq. The problem was now one of criminality which did not require UK troops on the streets but police, and a judicial process. Persisting in patrolling with foreign troops “was not a good idea”.³⁹⁷

³⁹⁶ House of Commons, *Official Report*, 30 April 2003, columns 15-16WS.

³⁹⁷ Cabinet Conclusions, 1 May 2003.

707. Overnight on 1/2 May, the UK military AO was adjusted to be coterminous with the boundaries of Basra and Maysan provinces.³⁹⁸

708. On 2 May, Mr Rycroft gave Mr Blair a set of papers on the UK contribution to ORHA (see Section 10.1).³⁹⁹ None addressed the issue of coterminous boundaries for the UK military AOR and ORHA's southern region.

709. The Inquiry has seen no indication that Mr Blair subsequently raised the issue.

710. During May, ORHA was subsumed into the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) (see Sections 9.1 and 10.1).

711. Resolution 1483 confirming the UN's role in post-conflict Iraq was adopted on 22 May.

712. On 14 June, Ministers "noted" that it had been decided that the UK AO would expand to four provinces at the end of July and that substantial Italian and Dutch military forces were expected to have deployed to the South by mid-July.

713. The Inquiry has seen no indication of when the decision on the expansion of the UK AO had been taken or by whom.

714. United Nations Security Council resolution 1483 (2003) was adopted on 22 May.⁴⁰⁰

715. The resolution, described in more detail in Section 9.1, confirmed that there would be a role for the UN, exercised through a Special Representative to the Secretary-General, but made it clear that the UN would not have the lead responsibility for the administration and reconstruction of Iraq, which would fall to the CPA. The resolution also called for help in the reform, rebuilding, stabilisation and security of Iraq, including from international financial institutions.

716. An internal PJHQ briefing on 12 June reported that there was "a trend of intelligence reporting from the UK AOR showing increasing dissatisfaction of the civil populace".⁴⁰¹ The briefing attributed the deterioration in the relationship between UK forces and the local population to a lack of food, failure to ensure essential services "such as water, electricity and security", a general increase in anti-Coalition rhetoric from Shia clerics, a lack of accurate information/news reporting and a lack of progress in the political process.

³⁹⁸ Letter Burrige to CJO, 8 May 2003, 'NCC Op TELIC Hauldown Report'.

³⁹⁹ [Minute Rycroft to Prime Minister, 2 May 2003, 'Iraq: ORHA'](#).

⁴⁰⁰ UN Press Release, 22 May 2003, *Security Council lifts sanctions on Iraq, approves UN role, calls for appointment of Secretary-General's Special Representative (SC/7765)*.

⁴⁰¹ Minute DACOS J3(Ops Sp) and DACOS J2(Int) to MA/DCJO(Ops), 12 June 2003, 'Relations with the Basrah Population'.

717. The Annotated Agenda for the 12 June meeting of the AHMGIR advised that security in the South remained fragile.⁴⁰² Iraqi frustration with the pace of progress could cause the situation to deteriorate. The UK's ability to "push the pace" would be constrained by the reduction in UK military force strength following the transition to 3rd (UK) Mechanised Division in July.

718. The Annotated Agenda also stated that the UK AO would expand to four provinces at the end of July, to match the area of CPA(South), and that substantial Italian and Dutch military forces were expected over the next four to six weeks.

719. The meeting of the AHMGIR on 12 June also considered a joint DFID/MOD paper entitled 'UK Support to the CPA South Area – Next Steps'. The paper assessed that:

"CPA(South) is unable to deliver in terms of determining priority needs, overseeing implementation, or supporting the political transition. There is a lack of vision; CPA(South) is severely undermanned; and has almost no systems or resources in place to deliver any tangible improvements soon. In consequence, 1 (UK) Div retains almost all executive authority in the UK area of operations (AO). In turn, locals look to the British military, not CPA(South), to address local problems. To the extent that these functions are being carried out at present, it is due to the unstinting efforts of 1 (UK) Div, the few UK secondees in the South, and, more importantly, the high quality of the Iraqi counterparts they are working with."

720. At the meeting, Ministers noted that it had been decided that the UK area of military operations would be expanded to cover four provinces (Muthanna, Dhi Qar, Maysan and Basra), to match the area of CPA(South).⁴⁰³

721. Mr Straw, as Chair of the AHMGIR, the body responsible for determining UK policy on post-conflict Iraq, should have ensured well before June that the AHMGIR agreed a position on the UK's AOR in Iraq that took full account of wider strategic implications and contingent liabilities, and sought Mr Blair's formal endorsement of the AHMGIR's conclusions. There is no indication that he did so.

722. MND(SE) was established formally on 12 July.⁴⁰⁴ Its creation coincided with the handover from 1 (UK) Div to 3 (UK) Div.

723. The boundaries of MND(SE) matched those of CPA(South).

⁴⁰² Annotated Agenda, 12 June 2003 Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting [attaching Paper DFID/MOD, 11 June 2003, 'UK Support to the CPA South Area – Next Steps'](#).

⁴⁰³ Minutes, 12 June 2003, Ad Hoc Group on Iraq Rehabilitation meeting.

⁴⁰⁴ Report Lamb, 30 January 2004, 'Post Operational Tour Report – Version 1 Operation TELIC 2/3 11 July to 28 December 2003'.

724. When asked exactly when the decision was made that the UK would take responsibility for the South and who was involved in that decision, Mr Blair told the Inquiry:

“... from January 2003 it was obvious – not obvious, sorry – it was agreed we would be going in through the south ... So we would be, as it were, with de facto responsibility for that area. I think. Mike Jackson gave evidence to you which said really in a sense our responsibility for the aftermath in that sector grew out of the fact that this was our area of operations in the conflict.

“We then ... had a meeting on 6 March ... I didn’t resolve that finally then.

“There was then a Cabinet Office note of 19 March ... saying, ‘We should decide on sectors, and then a joint Foreign and Defence Secretary minute is coming to you ...’

“So we didn’t take a final view then, but their note to me was, the expectation is the UK forces would be responsible for a task focused on Basra. I then had that meeting with them.

“On 21 March Matthew Rycroft then notes out to the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence: ‘The Prime Minister ... agrees with the Foreign and Defence Secretaries’ proposals, provided there is a satisfactory resolution’, and then I list certain issues.

“Then again the Foreign Office write to Matthew Rycroft, and then what happens is that we establish at some point then the Ad Hoc Committee [the Ad Hoc Ministerial Group on Iraq Rehabilitation], capital ‘A’, capital ‘H’ this time, with Jack Straw in charge, and out of that comes the view we should be responsible for that sector and this should be part of a joint Occupying Power and responsibility. I have to say, though, it was always pretty obvious that’s where we would end up.”⁴⁰⁵

725. Asked whether, during that period, there had been a specific decision on taking responsibility for the South, Mr Blair replied:

“I think the specific decision ultimately was taken when we then got resolution 1483. Most of the discussion here was not really about whether we should be responsible for the South or not. It was about the UN role. Then what happened was there were these Ad Hoc Committee meetings that Jack was chairing ... They were going through all this in an immense amount of detail, legal advice and so on. Peter Goldsmith was on it. Then we got 1483, reported it to Cabinet and agreed it.”⁴⁰⁶

726. The UK military plan approved by Mr Blair on 14 March defined the UK’s Phase IV AOR as an area broadly equivalent to the single province of Basra.

⁴⁰⁵ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, pages 117-119.

⁴⁰⁶ Public hearing, 21 January 2011, page 119.

727. Four months later, on 12 July, the UK assumed military responsibility for four provinces.

728. For the next six years, the UK was responsible for maintaining security in those provinces, initially as an Occupying Power and, from June 2004, in support of the Iraqi Government.

729. Sections 6.4 and 6.5 consider the reasons for the Government's failure to prepare a flexible, realistic and fully resourced post-conflict plan integrating UK civilian and military resources in a single national effort.

730. The process leading to the creation of the UK AOR followed that pattern, even after the creation of the AHMGIR.

731. Section 10.1 considers the impact of the AHMGIR in greater detail.

Lessons

732. The military plan for the invasion of Iraq depended for success on a rapid advance on Baghdad, including convincing the Iraqi population of the Coalition's determination to remove the regime.

733. By the end of March, the Government had recognised the need for sustained communication of key strategic messages and improved capabilities to reach a range of audiences in the UK, Iraq and the wider international community. But there was clearly a need for more robust arrangements to integrate Coalition efforts in the UK, US and the forces deployed in Iraq.

734. The reaction of the media and the Iraqi population to perceived difficulties encountered within days of the start of an operation, which was planned to last up to 125 days, might have been anticipated if there had been more rigorous examination of possible scenarios pre-conflict and the media had better understood the original concept of operations and the nature of the Coalition responses to the situations they encountered once the campaign began.

735. The difficulty and complexity of successfully delivering distinct strategic messages to each of the audiences a government needs to reach should not be underestimated. For any future military operations, arrangements tailored to meet the circumstances of each operation need to be put in place in both London and on the ground before operations begin.

736. When the UK acceded to the US request that it assume leadership of a military Area of Responsibility (AOR) encompassing four provinces in southern Iraq, it did so without a robust analysis either of the strategic implications for the UK or of the military's capacity to support the UK's potential obligations in the region.

737. A step of such magnitude should be taken deliberately and having considered the wider strategic and resource implications and contingent liabilities.

738. That requires all government departments whose responsibilities will be engaged to have been formally involved in providing Ministers with coherent inter-departmental advice before decisions are taken; the proper function of the Cabinet Committee system.