

The Defence Committee

The Defence Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to examine the expenditure, administration, and policy of the Ministry of Defence and its associated public bodies.

Current membership

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The Committee is one of the departmental select committees, the powers of which are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in SO No 152. These are available on the Internet via www.parliament.uk.

Publications

The Reports and evidence of the Committee are published by The Stationery Office by Order of the House. All publications of the Committee (including press notices) are on the Internet at

www.parliament.uk/parliamentary_committees/defence_committee.cfm

A list of Reports of the Committee in the present Parliament is at the back of this volume.

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Mark Hutton (Clerk), Steven Mark (Second Clerk), Ian Rogers (Audit Adviser), Dr John Gearson (Committee Specialist), Lis McCracken (Committee Assistant), Sheryl Dinsdale (Secretary) and James McQuade (Senior Office Clerk).

Contacts

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First Special Report

The Defence Committee published its Third Report of Session 2003–04 on Lessons of Iraq as HC 57 on 16 March 2004. The Government’s response to this report was received on 14 May 2004. It is set out below.

Government response

1. We very much welcome the House of Commons Defence Committee’s report “*Lessons of Iraq*”. It is right and important that Parliamentarians with experience of Defence carefully examine the performance of Britain’s Armed Forces and civilians during high-intensity warfare at large scale. It is also proper for them to examine such areas as procurement, training and logistics, where work carried out previous to the campaign had a strong bearing on its successful outcome. We also value the Committee’s investigation into our performance during the period subsequent to major combat operations.

2. The report covers a large range of areas and presents 131 conclusions and recommendations. These conclusions are generally positive. Some of the issues covered are both detailed and technical. But in assessing the Operation overall, we very much welcome the Committee’s conclusion that: “The men and women of the Armed Forces deserve the highest praise for their conduct and performance in Iraq. The commitment required of them not only during the combat operations but also in the subsequent peacekeeping and peace support roles is of a very high order.”

3. This memorandum sets out below the Government’s response to each of the main points of Committee’s report in the order in which they were raised.

The men and women of the Armed Forces deserve the highest praise for their conduct and performance in Iraq. The commitment required of them not only during the combat operations but also in the subsequent peacekeeping and peace support roles is of a very high order. (Paragraph 1).

4. We agree with the Committee.

We extend our deepest sympathies to the families of those who lost their lives. (Paragraph 1).

5. We thank the Committee for its sympathies, which have been passed to the Service Casualty Organisations.

We welcome the openness of MOD and the Armed Forces in publishing its ‘lessons learned’ reports on operations in Iraq and we commend them for the efforts they made to do so promptly after the major combat phase had concluded. (Paragraph 6).

6. We welcome the Committee’s conclusion.

We regret that MOD has failed to provide us with certain documents which we have requested and has demonstrated on occasion less co-operation and openness than we

have the right to expect as a select Committee of the House of Commons. (Paragraph 21).

7. The Secretary of State has written to the Committee on this issue. We believe that the information that we withheld could not have been released without endangering current or future operations; nor do we agree with the Committee's conclusion in paragraph 21 that we could have released Commanding Officers' confidential accounts of the operation without endangering the candour of future accounts.

Special Forces

The 'increasing role' of Special Forces was demonstrated in operations in Afghanistan, and has now been emphatically reinforced by the crucial role which they played in Iraq. Their skills and professionalism provide a unique capability to the total British military effort. (Paragraph 23).

8. We agree that the Special Forces provide a unique capability to the total British military effort. We continue to invest in improving their capability through our Departmental Planning processes.

Planning and Strategy

The Debate within the Pentagon

The British, who had had embedded staff officers at Centcom from September 2001, were the first foreigners to be brought into the American planning process and appear to have been influential in the overall shape of the plan. In this the British-American relationship also drew on more than 10 years of close collaboration between the RAF and USAF in enforcing the northern and southern no-fly zones over Iraq. We are not, however, 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. (Paragraph 43).

9. The Department believes that the contribution made by embedded UK officers was influential in the overall shape of the plan. Bilateral engagement between Commander CENTCOM and the UK Chief of Joint Operations provided the most effective and immediate path of influence throughout the planning stages. Below this, the UK had two principal liaison officers fully engaged at the military-strategic and operational levels of command: CDS' Liaison Officer in the Pentagon, and the Senior British Military Adviser and his staff at CENTCOM. The final plan was therefore the product of both US and UK thinking, discussion and ideas.

Effect of Operation FRESCO

Although the Armed Forces commitment to Operation FRESCO did not prevent them from putting together an effective force package for the operation in Iraq, it did limit the total numbers. It also adversely affected some elements of the force (by for example requiring high readiness units to move at short notice from fire-fighting to deploying

to Iraq). In the longer term it could have undermined the Armed Forces' ability to sustain combat operations. (Paragraph 56).

10. At the time of planning Operation TELIC the main effort for the Armed Forces was Operation FRESCO. However, the firefighting cover provided by the UK Armed Forces did not affect their ability to mount Operation TELIC. Obviously, if other commitments had not existed, the range of potential force packages would have been greater. That is always true. However, it does not follow that a different force package would have been better.

11. The air and maritime packages were in line with our Defence Planning Assumptions for an operation of this magnitude. They also provided specialist capabilities which add particular value to US forces, such as Air-to-Air Refuelling and Mine Counter Measures. Choosing the land component was more complicated because of the switch from planned operations in the North to South, which required an additional brigade—16 Air Assault Brigade—to strengthen our land assault capability. As a precaution we had made this possible by releasing the brigade from Operation FRESCO before Christmas.

Overall, the demands that Operation TELIC placed on UK Armed Forces in the context of other operational requirements were very close to the maximum that they could sustain. (Paragraph 57).

12. We accept that the requirement to support civilian authorities in the context of the firefighter strikes at the same time as the build up to hostilities in Iraq did place significant demands on our Armed Forces. These were, however, within our capabilities. When Operation FRESCO ended, further troops became available and this pressure was relieved.

13. The recent Defence White Paper acknowledged the additional demands placed on our Armed Forces by the range of expanding tasks and the level and frequency of operational deployments. Our planning assumptions have been revised accordingly and we intend to ensure that the Armed Forces are appropriately balanced for the challenges they are likely to face.

Planning Assumptions

We believe that MOD should consider whether for major equipment and capabilities the planning assumptions process is sufficiently flexible to match the very wide range of types and scales of operations which our Armed Forces may be required to undertake in the future. (Paragraph 59).

14. Planning assumptions are used to inform the development of the future structure of the Armed Forces to enable them best to meet the likely challenges of the future. In contrast to the Cold War, today's planning assumptions require flexible Armed Forces to meet a wide range of military tasks across different regions and environments. They are the result of a lengthy process of analysis of the future strategic environment that culminated in the publication of the Defence White Paper. They are guidelines—we may be able to do more from within the force structure, accepting that this will stretch personnel and resources, or we may choose to do less.

15. We need to strike the right balance between the programmed procurement of equipment and the purchase of equipment for specific operations as the result of an Urgent Operational Requirement (UOR). We should have equipment that is appropriate to the demands of the most likely and most frequent types of operation. It would be very costly, however, to hold a stockpile of equipment that is reserved solely for use on less frequent or likely operations. The UOR process is there to meet any shortfall and we need to ensure that it is responsive enough to meet the demands of operations that we might conduct with longer warning times.

The Northern option to the Southern option

From the evidence we have seen it appears that the late decision to move from the north to the south led to a requirement for the UK to deploy a significantly larger force—at least one brigade, something over 5,000 troops. This may well have been a contributory factor in complicating the various logistical problems that were later faced. (Paragraph 69).

16. The Committee correctly notes that following the decision to switch from the North to the South we judged we needed an additional brigade—16 Air Assault Brigade in this case. It is also possible that we would have required an additional brigade for the Northern Option, because of changes to the likely disposition of US forces under that option.

17. The additional troops required for the Southern Option did present a more challenging logistic supply task in volume terms. But while the Southern option resulted in a longer sea line of communication than the Northern option, both the land and sea lines of communication were easier to manage. Additionally, we were able to rationalise some elements of our structure by sharing some US logistic support there. Overall the Ministry of Defence is of the view that the challenges posed by mounting the Southern operation at relatively short notice were met, and that this was considerable achievement by our Armed Forces.

The Force Balance

MOD needs to urgently re-examine the mechanisms, including the use of reserves, by which units are brought to war establishment with minimal disruption in all important preparatory phases of the operations. (Paragraph 71).

18. The Army is already working through the “force generation” issues highlighted by Operation TELIC and experience on other recent operations. The outcome of this work will be the Future Army Structure, which was noted in the Defence White Paper (para 4.12). A formal announcement is expected later this year but options include closer integration between the Reserves and Regular forces and re-balancing manpower better to deliver the deployable element of the Army.

Overall, however, the signs are that, above Brigade level (i.e. at Division level), UK Armed Forces have become a one operation force—one operation which must be followed by a lengthy period of recovery before they can be in position to mount another similar operation, even within a Coalition. (Paragraph 74).

19. In the context of other commitments including Operation FRESCO, the demands of Operation TELIC were close to the top end of the spectrum of what we might expect the Armed Forces to be able to achieve. But this level of commitment reflects current Defence Policy, which is based upon developments and evidence since the SDR and its New Chapter, and the security challenges we foresee in the future.

20. The Defence White Paper described how the MOD plans to operate in the future strategic environment, countering the threats of WMD proliferation and international terrorism and addressing the challenges of weak and failing states. It is explicit about the scale of forces we require for the types of expeditionary operation that we should plan to undertake. It concluded that we need flexible Armed Forces that are structured and equipped for the most likely and most frequent types of operation at small and medium scale, in other words up to brigade level for the land component, while also meeting our Standing Tasks and Commitments.

21. Given time to prepare, the Armed Forces should be able to undertake a single large-scale operation like Operation TELIC (with a division-sized land component) while still maintaining a commitment to a small-scale operation in addition to the Standing Tasks and Commitments. To do more than this would require a significant increase in the size of the Armed Forces. These planning assumptions guide development of capability and are not intended to constrain or precisely describe the actual pattern of operational commitments. We may do less or may be able to do more. A period of recuperation is required after any operation to ensure that personnel can be rested and trained for other tasks, stockpiles can be replenished, and equipment replaced.

We are pleased to learn that according to *Lessons for the Future*, MOD intends to review the generation of force elements at readiness and the implications for notice to move times. But we feel that MOD should be more explicit in articulating what scale of forces can be offered for expeditionary operations of choice in the future, while ensuring adequate resources, equipment and training time. (Paragraph 75).

22. Force Elements at Readiness (FE@R) are regularly reviewed as part of the Short Term Plan process and in line with changes to the policy framework described in Defence Strategic Guidance. The FE@R requirement is then published in the confidential section of the Departmental Plan, which forms the baseline for setting resource priorities. Defence Planning Assumptions are currently being reviewed as part of the revised guidance that will be published in 2005. This includes a more fundamental look at readiness in order to align timelines more closely with resources.

Command and Control

The appointment of a deployed UK National Contingent Commander worked effectively in Operation TELIC. (Paragraph 82).

23. We agree that the deployed UK national Contingent Commander based in the NCC headquarters worked effectively during Operation TELIC. We will keep under review what might be the best arrangements for any given operation.

We expect MOD to revisit the question of the deployability of PJHQ, raised in the SDR, in the light of recent operations, and we look forward to their conclusions. (Paragraph 82).

24. Through the Joint Force Headquarters, PJHQ is already deployable.

Command Relations with the Americans

We recommend that MOD considers whether the highest levels of British command structures might be made more adaptable so as to be able to operate more closely in parallel with their American counterparts, when UK and US forces are operating together. (Paragraph 84).

25. We do not agree. The Coalition command structures were closely integrated.

The Maritime Component

The Royal Fleet Auxiliary (RFA) made a vital contribution to the operation. MOD should ensure that the shortcomings which were highlighted are addressed. (Paragraph 88).

26. The Royal Navy is looking at the issue of Maritime Force Protection in the light of the lessons from Operation TELIC and the terrorist threat. The RFA will be included within this package. Measures range from individual body armour and night vision equipment to the Block Phalanx weapon system. These measures incur a cost and will be considered in relation to other priorities.

27. All RFA ships are currently fitted with close range weapons for self-defence. These weapons are either 20mm or 30mm cannon and 7.62 General Purpose Machine Guns. FORT VICTORIA and FORT GEORGE are also fitted with a Phalanx Close In Weapon System. All RFA crews are trained to operate and maintain the weapons onboard. Additional defensive measures are being considered to counter the asymmetric threat.

28. The replenishment capability of RFA ships varies between the different classes and depends on their specific roles. The larger FORT class ships are designed for full Task Force operations and are capable of conducting simultaneous multi-ship replenishment and flight deck operations. Others, such as the older LEAF class, only have a single ship replenishment capability. MOD is currently looking at the requirements for replacing the older RFA ships and that work will include analysis of the replenishment capability requirements for future ships.

Targeting

There is clear evidence of UK influence on the air targeting operations of the Coalition. Principally this influence seems to have been applied to issues of perception, specifically how attacking particular targets would be received by European allies. 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. (Paragraph 98).

29. We note that the Committee recognises that the UK had influence in the decision-making process for Coalition targeting.

30. We are sorry the Committee has stated that we failed to provide them with examples of UK influence. We provided the Committee with classified material at the time of the request that we feel adequately answered their query. The Committee did not indicate at the time that they were dissatisfied.

We feel that the shortcomings in the practice and training of close air support by the RAF and land forces which have emerged in recent operations must be urgently addressed. This will require a reassessment of the numbers of and equipment for Forward Air Controllers, both on the ground and in the air, the provision of adequate targeting pods for individual aircraft and significantly greater exercising of these capabilities in a joint environment. Such exercises are likely to have to take place overseas since, as we understand it, no UK based facility exists for such training. (Paragraph 104).

31. The interface between the air and land environments is the subject of the Coningham/Keyes study. This is a joint initiative between LAND and STRIKE Commands. Training for Forward Air Controllers and Tactical Air Control Parties (TACP) is a specific study area and emerging findings are looking to realign exercises between the two commands in order to improve training opportunities. The Army has also created additional TACPs in each Division and is working to establish further teams in each manoeuvre Brigade. A programme to provide tactical satellite communications for these parties is scheduled to deliver by January 2005. The RAF acknowledge the need for more targeting pods but this is subject to the priorities placed on the Equipment Programme and has been judged unaffordable at this time.

32. We are considering proposals for an enhanced exercise programme.

Effective and timely arrangements for assessing battle damage are crucial for continuously informing the campaign plan and for establishing whether the aim of minimising damage to civilians and civilian infrastructure has been achieved. We look to MOD to exploit the latest technological advances to further improve the speed and accuracy of battle damage assessment. (Paragraph 106).

33. We agree that timely Battle Damage Assessment (BDA) is important. During Operation TELIC, however, the scale of the air campaign meant there were insufficient resources available to carry out the BDA task during major combat operations. Technical and intelligence availability issues continue to limit our ability to conduct BDA as effectively as we would wish; future developments of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) and Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR) platforms may alleviate this.

Use of Reserves

Call-out and mobilisation

While we are pleased to learn that for Operations TELIC 2 and 3, MOD has been able to give most reservists 21 days notice to report, we are concerned that for TELIC 1 reservists were given 14 days notice to report, and in some cases considerably less. We expect MOD to ensure that the appropriate lessons are learned to avoid the need for such short notice to report, and to recognise the impact of this on reservists, their families and their employers. (Paragraph 116).

34. Notice to report for compulsory call-out is set by operational requirements. Ideally we would aim to give both regular reservists and volunteer reservists 21 days notice to report for service, but this cannot always be achieved. For TELIC I, in order to ensure the reserves were ready in time, generally we were only able to give 14 days notice to report. In some instances notice to report was considerably shorter. For operational reasons we were unable to avoid mobilising a number of key enablers soon after the call-out order was made.

35. For TELIC II and III, in general we were able to give reservists 21 days notice to report. Again, this could not be guaranteed and a small number of reservists received a shorter notice to report due mainly to late changes to operational requirements.

36. As the Operation matures and planning can be carried out further in advance, we hope to move to 30 days notice to report for Op TELIC. In practice for TELIC IV we have generally achieved over 28 days notice to report and we shall strive to maintain this level of notice. However, it must be understood that there will always be last minute changes of requirement and/or operational circumstances which mean that we cannot guarantee a set notice to report period for reservists.

We expect MOD and the reserve organisations to take appropriate action to ensure that reservists are made fully aware of their liability for call out. (Paragraph 117).

37. Every individual joining the Volunteer Reserve is made aware of his or her call-out liability under the Reserve Forces Act 1996. In addition, when joining the Regular Armed Forces, individuals are informed that they may have a Regular Reserve liability when they complete their term of regular service. They are also reminded of this liability when they are discharged from service and their Regular Reserve liability commences.

38. During the initial stages of the Op TELIC Lessons Identified exercise, however, it became clear that many reservists were unsure of the extent of their call-out liability and that they were unprepared for mobilisation. As a direct result of this finding all three Services have instigated 'Mobilisation Matters' training packages which are being given to Volunteer Reservists as part of their routine training.

We recommend that MOD consider what action can be taken to ensure that the substantial proportion of regular reservists who failed their medicals return to being 'fit for role'. (Paragraph 119).

39. There are established procedures for monitoring the fitness of Volunteer Reservists who fail mobilisation medicals. For Regular Reservists, however, there are no procedures to monitor medical fitness, nor is there any way of enforcing the maintenance of medical fitness once an individual has left the Regular Forces. As part of the Lessons Identified process, however, we are considering the future role of the Regular Reserve. This will include considering methods of monitoring and maintaining medical fitness and dental health. At the time of writing it is too early to say what conclusions may be reached.

Overall, it appears that the majority of reservists mobilising through Chilwell considered that they had received adequate training before being deployed. However, we are concerned about the non-alignment of Territorial Army (TA) and Regular shooting standards and expect MOD to address this issue as soon as possible. (Paragraph 122).

40. The TA has a limited number of training days per year compared to the training available to Regular soldiers. It must, therefore, be recognised that we cannot expect the TA to match Regular soldiers' training standards in all subjects including Skill at Arms. Nevertheless, previous to Operation TELIC, Skill at Arms was one of many areas where we delivered improvements by introducing Phase One Training: the Common Military Syllabus (Recruit) TA (on 1 April 2003). This programme not only reduces the training gap with Regular soldiers across a range of skills but also identifies that training which needs to be addressed on mobilisation. Skill at Arms is one of the basic training requirements for all soldiers and is under continuous development. Concurrent activity across a number of work strands for the TA seeks to improve both the annual Skill at Arms standard and attainment level required for the TA's emerging roles.

41. In addition, once called-out, members of the TA undergo a short period of pre-deployment training. The aim of this training is to prepare reservists for the theatre to which they will deploy and provide refresher training in key areas including weapons handling. Once this training is complete, reservists are deployed to theatre. On arrival, they then undergo further training to ensure that they are fully prepared for the role they are to perform.

Finance and compensation issues

We are concerned to learn that some TA reservists experienced problems regarding their pay. We understand that for future operations, where significant numbers of reservists are deployed, PJHQ have agreed to the deployment of a Reserves Cell whose role will include issues such as pay and allowances. We expect MOD to ensure that this lesson is implemented in full. (Paragraph 125).

42. We accept that there were a few problems with pay delivery. Some reservists' pay statements did not get delivered to units in the desert. This meant that they did not know that they were being paid, or how much they were being paid. For the small number that did experience pay delivery problems, we are not aware of any delay in the payment of reservists' basic military salary. However, there have been some late payments of allowances for reservists during Operation TELIC, which are attributable to delays in the administrative process for taking the reservist on strength at the Theatre unit. In addition, there have also been delays in handling claims for financial assistance. This is due, in the

main, to reservists failing to provide the evidence necessary to process claims. Both of these issues were identified during the Operation TELIC lessons identified process and action is in hand to improve the administrative systems in use.

43. We fully accept the Committee's recommendation. A dedicated Reserves Cell that can deal with reserve issues, including pay, has been in theatre since TELIC. The need for such a cell has been written into our future deployment plans.

It is clearly wrong that reservists who are compulsorily mobilised for combat operations should lose out financially. We note that to date only a small number of appeals have been made by reservists dissatisfied with their individual financial arrangements. We recommend that these be considered sympathetically and that MOD monitor closely the numbers and outcomes of such appeals over the coming months. (Paragraph 126).

44. The Committee appears to have misunderstood the Financial Assistance process. Should a reservist be dissatisfied with the amount of financial assistance awarded by MOD, they have a right to appeal to an independent Reserve Forces Appeals Tribunal. This is organised by the Employment Tribunal Service who supply the members of the Appeals Tribunal. As the appeal procedure is independent of MOD, we cannot influence the outcome of appeals. However, we do make every effort to resolve cases sympathetically before an appeal hearing is needed.

45. At the time of writing the total number of appeals that had been submitted was 116 of which five were reservist financial appeals. Two were resolved to the reservists' satisfaction before the appeal date, leaving three which have gone to appeal. The Tribunal found in favour of MOD in two cases. The final case is still outstanding.

We expect MOD to ensure that the procedures for reservists claiming financial assistance are streamlined and less intrusive. (Paragraph 127).

46. We agree with the Committee's recommendation. As already detailed in the recent Defence White Paper, work is in hand to produce new regulations governing the award of both Reservist Standard Award and Reservists Hardship Award. The new regulations will take into account the lessons arising from the mobilisation for Iraq. This work is being undertaken as a priority.

Employment issues

We note that MOD has commissioned a study to measure the degree of employer support for the mobilisation of the Reserve and look forward to seeing the findings and the lessons that MOD identify. But we consider that MOD needs to adopt a more proactive approach to identifying cases where reservists have experienced employment problems following a period of mobilisation. Reservists need to be assured that they will not lose their jobs, as a result of being mobilised, and that support will be available if they encounter such problems. (Paragraph 129).

47. We agree that a proactive approach is the best way of dealing with this problem. That is why, in cooperation with the regional Reserve Forces and Cadets Associations, we have introduced regional Employer Support Executives to liaise with employers on a number of

issues including employment problems following mobilisation. We are also introducing Unit Employer Support Officers to strengthen our capability in this area further.

48. We do not take the support of employers for granted and have, for many years, run a campaign to win and maintain the support of employers for the Reserve Forces. Support to British Reserve Employers provides the main elements of this campaign. Since the beginning of Op TELIC we have been writing to the employers of those reservists who have been called out to thank them for their support. Additionally, we have held a number of regional receptions in order to thank employers personally.

49. With regard to employment protection, under the Reserve Forces (Safeguard of Employment) Act 1985, employers are required to take back into employment former employees who have completed called-out service. The Act also deals with the terms and conditions of reservists when reinstated to civilian employment. If an employer fails to take a reservist back into employment or infringes any of his or her rights under the 1985 Act, the reservist may apply to a Reinstatement Committee which will decide on the matter. The Committee has the power to require employment to be made available to the reservist, or may order the employer to pay compensation, or both. Our experience so far is that there have been 17 cases that have been heard by Reinstatement Committees.

50. We are fully aware of the need to monitor reinstatement difficulties, and we liaise closely with the employment Tribunal Service to keep full track of all Reinstatement Committee hearings.

We are very concerned to learn that 11 members of the TA in Germany (over a quarter of the TA in Germany deployed to Operation TELIC), who form part of a key squadron (the Amphibious Engineer Squadron), lost their jobs with civilian employers on returning from deployment on Operation TELIC. We expect MOD and the reserve organisations to raise these matters with the relevant authorities within Germany and with the civilian employers of the TA reservists in Germany. (Paragraph 131).

51. We were very concerned to learn that 11 members of the TA in Germany lost their civilian jobs on returning from deployment on Operation TELIC. These individuals were not protected by the provisions of the Reserve Forces (Safeguard of Employment) Act 1985, as they are British nationals who live overseas and are not protected by UK law. We have, therefore, as a temporary measure offered all those who were unable to regain their civilian jobs Full-Time Reserve Service with the Army for 12 months or until they are able to find alternative work. In addition, we plan to raise the matter of reservists' employment protection with the relevant authorities within Germany.

We are concerned that the requirement on reservists to inform their employers of their reserve status seems to have been announced ahead of the findings of MOD's own study on employer support. There does not seem to have been prior consultation with members of the Reserve. We recommend that MOD set out why it chose to make this change at this time. (Paragraph 132).

52. This subject has been the topic of much debate both within MOD and with reservists and employers. Surveys undertaken by the Ministry of Defence have shown that a large majority of reservists have already told their employers that they are members of the

Volunteer Reserve. In addition, when reservists are mobilised their employers are automatically informed of their membership of the reserve forces. Therefore, we do not expect routine employer notification to have a significant impact on employer support.

53. The introduction of employer notification was announced by Written Ministerial Statement on 3 February 2004 (Official Report, Column WS25). Currently members of the Volunteer Reserve Forces (VRF) are required to declare their employment status and to provide details of their employer(s) to MOD. They are also encouraged to inform their employer(s) of their membership of the VRF and of their liability for training and call out. A majority are believed to have done so. They will now be required to give their consent for MOD to do so automatically. This change of policy is a reasonable requirement for the individual. It will permit employers to plan for an employee's absence for full time military service and thereby contribute directly to reducing mobilisation risk by minimising the likelihood of employer applications for exemption at time of call out.

54. Employer notification was implemented with effect from 1 April 2004 for all new entrants to the VRF and for all current members of the VRF as they re-engage unless granted an exemption waiver. Employer notification will also apply with effect from 1 April 2005 to those who do not routinely re-engage such as commissioned officers.

Impact on the Reserves

It is unreasonable that reserve personnel deployed on Operation TELIC should have to do additional service, on top of the six to nine months taken up by that tour, to qualify for their annual bounty and we recommend that MOD waives this requirement. (Paragraph 134).

55. We disagree. Reservists do not earn training bounty when undertaking mobilised service. Although they are delivering operational capability by carrying out their trade tasks in an operational environment, they are not meeting the bounty requirements for training. The reason for this rule is that it is a *training* bounty, paid to those who undertake the required elements of peacetime training to ensure they are fit for mobilisation. We recognise, however, that mobilisation has made it difficult for some reservists to meet their training bounty requirement. Authority has therefore been granted for mobilised service to count in lieu of the continuous training element conducted during annual camp. Nevertheless, reservists must additionally complete their weekend training with their volunteer reserve unit in order to qualify for bounty.

MOD has identified a number of lessons relating to the Reserve from the experience of Operation TELIC. We look to MOD to implement these lessons in full. We welcome the announcement that, following Operation TELIC, MOD is adjusting the arrangements for the higher management of the Reserve and that the Directorate of Reserve Forces and Cadets will come under the direct command of the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff, which reflects the importance of this key part of our Armed Forces. (Paragraph 135).

56. We agree with the Committee that the reserves form a key part of the Armed Forces. In order to reflect this we have reviewed and amended our organisational structure to reflect

this. A new two star reserve post, Assistant Chief of Defence Staff (Reserves and Cadets), has been established who reports directly to Vice Chief of the Defence Staff.

57. With regard to the recommendations arising out of the use of reserves during Operation TELIC, many of these have already been implemented. Work continues to implement those that remain. In addition, we will continue to modify and improve our policies and practices on the use of Reserves in light of current and future operations.

Throughout our inquiry we have come into contact with a range of reservists who served on Operation TELIC. As with the Regular service personnel, we have been impressed with their dedication and the invaluable contribution they made. We concur with MOD's conclusion that reservists 'showed the highest quality and commitment... their value in all phases of an operation has again been demonstrated.' (Paragraph 136).

58. We agree. We are grateful for the commitment and professionalism with which reservists carry out their duties.

Defence Medical Services

Manning

We find it worrying that some five years after the Strategic Defence Review the problems in the Defence Medical Services (DMS), in particular the problem of under-manning, appear to be as bad as they ever have been. We were alarmed to learn that for the major specialities for war MOD had 'emptied the boxes' for Operation TELIC. Further deployments in the near future are only likely to exacerbate the problems. (Paragraph 143).

59. It is simply not true that "some five years after the Strategic Defence the problems in the DMS" are "as bad as they ever were". Compared with March 1999, in January 2004 we had nearly 350 more fully trained medical personnel, and over 500 more trainees in the pipeline.

60. We are making good progress in addressing shortages in those areas where under-manning remains a problem, with an emphasis on certain key clinical specialties: A&E, Anaesthetics, General Medicine, General Surgery, Orthopaedics, Burns and Plastics and Radiology.

61. The Medical Manning and Retention Review has established a new pay structure to improve comparability with the NHS, and the flexibility to respond to future NHS changes. Pay for our Medical and Dental Officers improved by 10 per cent last year. We have introduced a system of financial recruitment initiatives (the "Golden Hellos" scheme) targeting certain categories of consultants, General Medical Practitioners and certain categories of nurses.

62. Other measures to address under-manning include greater integration of the medical reserve and the use of civilian medical personnel on enduring operations. One civilian consultant anaesthetist has been working in Bosnia since December 03. We also intend to send a civilian consultant team to Iraq.

63. Operation TELIC was a large-scale operation; the most demanding one-off deployment for which we plan. Unsurprisingly, the DMS, in common with other components of our Armed Forces, was fully occupied supporting this commitment. But as with all previous operations, we were fully able to meet the operational requirement.

64. We continue to provide essential medical force protection to the UK Armed Forces in Iraq. We remain confident of our continuing ability to meet the MOD's planning assumptions, and hence to support likely future deployments.

We acknowledge that the manning issue is not an easy one to address quickly, but we look to MOD, the Department of Health, the NHS and the medical profession to support the DMS in its efforts to find new and innovative solutions. (Paragraph 144).

65. We are already working closely with the Department of Health and the NHS. Under the terms of a Concordat signed with the Department of Health in September 2002, we have established a Partnership Board to address matters of mutual interest. The Partnership Board also includes representatives from the NHS and the devolved administrations in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales.

66. A current initiative is to deploy NHS Integrated Medical Teams to assist in the provision of medical support on enduring operations. This will release regular and reserve medical specialists for short notice operations, and alleviate deployment fatigue. It will also provide career development and vocational training for NHS staff in a challenging environment.

67. We have already received positive responses from four NHS Trusts, and hope to deploy the first medical specialists from a NHS acute trust in January 2005. We anticipate that, if this deployment is successful, it will lead to further positive responses from other NHS Trusts.

We recommend that MOD bring together the Department of Health, the NHS and the medical profession with the DMS in order urgently to identify solutions to the problem of increasing specialism among surgeons in the NHS. (Paragraph 146).

68. We are already engaged with the Department of Health, the NHS and the medical profession on these issues, and we are making good progress.

69. We are confident that we will be able to make the increasing trend towards specialisation among surgeons in the NHS work for us, rather than against us.

70. Our surgeons must train to NHS standards and expectations, and must, therefore, have a sub-speciality that benefits their NHS Trust. Equally, our surgeons need to retain competencies of a general nature for use on deployment. The two requirements are not necessarily opposed, as most sub-specialities will involve transferable skills.

71. We are working to ensure that, where necessary, we can provide our surgeons with the additional training they require to meet operational demands. For example, we have an arrangement with South Africa whereby DMS surgeons receive specialist trauma training there. This training is vital to the DMS as it enables surgeons to train in the treatment of gunshot wounds.

We are most concerned to learn that 47 medical reservists have resigned on returning from Operation TELIC, and that MOD is aware of further resignations from Army medical reservists. The number of resignations represents some six per cent of the 760 medical reservists deployed. We expect MOD to monitor this issue closely, to identify the reasons behind the resignations, and to take account of these in its recruitment and retention efforts. (Paragraph 147).

72. Every year a small number of our medical reservists leave for a variety of reasons, including an unwillingness to participate in future operations following exposure to the realities of a challenging deployment. This is to be expected, and we would certainly not wish to retain reservists who have become either unable or unwilling to meet their obligations.

73. So far, the numbers of medical reservists leaving, for whatever reason, following Operation TELIC are not exceptional by comparison with previous years.

74. If anything, the departure rate for medical reservists compares favourably with the normal average annual turnover rate for reservists as a whole. However, as with all retention issues the MOD will keep this under constant review.

Impact on the NHS

This was the first operation where all the medical personnel deployed came almost exclusively from the NHS and it appears that the arrangements, such as the liaison between MOD, the Department of Health, and NHS Trusts worked well. However, thankfully, the number of casualties was low and the arrangements for treating casualties in NHS hospitals were not fully tested. (Paragraph 149).

75. We welcome the Select Committees' acknowledgement of the success of our liaison with the Department of Health and NHS Trusts.

Medical equipment and supplies

We are pleased to learn that lessons about the need to have more medical supplies on the shelves rather than over-relying on UORs have been recognised. We expect MOD to identify the appropriate balance between holding items and relying on UORs. We also expect MOD to review any cases from Operation TELIC where inadequate or insufficient equipment may have disadvantaged clinical outcomes and, if any such cases are identified, to take appropriate action to avoid such situations occurring in the future. (Paragraph 152).

76. We are working hard with the Medical Supplies Agency and the Defence Logistics Organisation to establish and maintain an appropriate balance between holding items and relying on UORs.

77. We are not aware of any cases where inadequate or insufficient equipment disadvantaged clinical outcomes. Allegations to the contrary have not been substantiated.

Deployment

Sea Lift and Air Lift

We conclude that deploying such a large force to the Gulf in the time available was a significant achievement. (Paragraph 155).

78. We strongly agree that deploying such a large force to the Gulf in the time available was a significant achievement and a credit to our logistics organisation.

MOD should identify how the challenges of limited landing slots for aircraft and small seaports could be addressed in the future. (Paragraph 158).

79. We note the committee's recommendation, although the committee has also recognised that we were successful in deploying a large force to the Gulf in a short period of time. It will clearly be important that the planning for any deployment takes account of the physical constraints at the points of disembarkation.

We recognise the achievement of the DTMA in securing the sea lift for Operation TELIC. We recommend that, drawing on the experience from Operation TELIC, MOD should undertake a review of ro-ro shipping to inform its future planning. (Paragraph 162).

80. We agree that the acquisition of sufficient sealift was a major achievement and vindicated our procedures and practices. The availability of RoRo shipping is reviewed by the Department on a continuous basis, which will inform future planning.

The action taken by MOD ensured that the UK had sufficient lift, but the outcome could well have been different. For any future operations, MOD needs to avoid competing directly with the US for outsize lift and co-ordinate its efforts to secure such assets. (Paragraph 163).

81. Every effort is made as part of the planning process to avoid competing with our allies for outsize lift.

Recent operations have highlighted the need for sufficient sea and air lift. We look to MOD to ensure that those assets that have performed their task well are available to our Armed Forces in the future. We regret that the A400M programme, which is intended to meet the UK's Future Transport Aircraft requirement, has experienced delays to its planned in-service date. We expect MOD to ensure that the current forecast in-service date is met and that any capability gaps from delays already experienced are filled. (Paragraph 167).

82. The Department is procuring 25 A400M not 180 aircraft (which is the total number of aircraft being purchased through OCCAR) as mentioned in the report at paragraph 166. The Out-of-Service Date for the Hercules C-130K fleet is linked to the In-Service Date (ISD) of the A400M. We expect the current A400M ISD to be met, but if for any reason this does not happen, then Hercules and C-17 aircraft will fill any capability gaps.

Urgent Operational Requirements

We acknowledge that there were constraints on when the UOR process could begin, but it is of real concern that in some cases this resulted in Armed Forces personnel not having access to the full complement of equipment, such as Minimi machine guns and Underslung Grenade Launchers. (Paragraph 177).

83. The Department accepts that, on occasion, Urgent Operational Requirements' (UOR) delivery timescales will be tight. Any shortfalls that occurred did not in the event affect operational capability. The decision as to whether our forces were ready for combat operations, quite rightly, rested with the operational commanders. They would not have allowed their troops to cross the line without the necessary equipment for the task.

Much of the equipment procured as UORs made a significant contribution to the success of the campaign and, in most cases, industry supplied equipment at very short notice. However UORs are not the solution in every case. MOD needs to be better informed of which types of equipment and capabilities can be delivered in UOR timescales—there were a number of cases where equipment was not delivered by the time required or where users did not have a full complement. We do not consider that MOD planning properly recognised that the delivery date for a piece of equipment and the date by which a capability is achieved are not the same. If personnel are to be confident and fully efficient with their equipment there must be adequate time for familiarisation, training and integration. Furthermore, given the desire stated in the recent White Paper to be able to intervene anywhere in the world at short notice, we believe that the risks of relying on UORs instead of holding adequate stocks, are not sufficiently well analysed or understood in MOD's risk assessment processes. (Paragraph 181).

84. The right balance needs to be struck between having expensive stocks on the shelves and relying on procurement during the readiness period. To keep large stock levels—so that we could do another operation of this size at shorter notice—would be very costly. We have to factor affordability into the equation, and make judgements on the likelihood of action being required. The Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO) holds stocks in accordance with agreed planning assumptions. These assumptions have recently been looked at in detail and were reissued in revised form in August 2003. We have started to identify the detailed actions we need to take regarding stock levels.

85. The UOR process is used to fine-tune military capability to ensure UK forces are as well equipped as possible for the tasks they are asked to carry out. There will always be capabilities we would like to have, but which we will not be able to obtain in time for operations. But it must be borne in mind that the capability we do have is highly potent, and with relatively minor enhancement provides a strong basis on which to build successful operations, such as those so recently carried out.

86. While the Department acknowledges that tight delivery timescales can reduce the time available for training prior to commencement of operations, many UORs were procured to provide additional equipment of a type already held or to make minor modifications to it. Such measures do not need much extra training. Moreover, the help provided by the

deployment of both the Armoured Training Development Unit and Infantry Training Development Unit into theatre was invaluable.

There are likely to be positive lessons from the UOR process which have applicability to MOD's normal equipment acquisition processes: for example, where UORs were used to accelerate existing programmes. We expect MOD to identify and implement these and reflect on the appropriateness of UOR procurement becoming institutionalised. (Paragraph 183).

87. There is a clear process in the Department for capturing Lessons Identified from Operations and exercises and the same applies to the UOR process. In addition, the National Audit Office (NAO) is in the middle of a study of the Department's UOR process to see if it is the most effective/efficient way of meeting urgent military needs. A report is expected during the summer.

We expect MOD to evaluate fully the performance of the equipment procured as UORs and the specific enhancements they provided to the UK's military capabilities. This evaluation must also take full account of the views of those members of the Armed Forces who used the equipment in action. Disposing of useful equipment cannot represent good value for money if it then has to be reacquired in the future. (Paragraph 184).

88. The Department assesses whether we should retain UORs in-service after an operation, and whether we can extend the enhancements across equipment fleets. If an enhancement is retained, our analysis will usually have shown that the benefit it offers in improved performance outweighs the possible complications in sustainability.

89. The UOR process allows us to respond to operations in extreme environments (such as the desert) and to the specific capabilities we anticipate opponents to have. We could not afford to equip all our forces against every threat and climatic extreme: a sensible balance has to be struck. At the conclusion of operations we review whether we should resource the continuation of individual UORs in-service from the Defence budget. We have been doing this recently for Operation TELIC UORs as part of the planning round.

90. The Department acknowledges the Committee's point that it can be wasteful to sell UORs and then buy them back. But we must be realistic about resource constraints: we cannot always afford to retain all the UOR equipment we want. In many cases we may not keep equipment in-service if it has been used heavily, or if technology is moving very fast. It may be better to buy state-of-the-art equipment rather than keep kit in warehouses for years.

The Start of Operations

From planning to operations—what was found

The Committee congratulates the Royal Navy for the success of the complex and demanding operation to clear mines from the waterway to Umm Qasr and urges the MOD to review, as a matter of urgency, the capability of the Royal Navy to undertake mine clearance operations in shallow and very shallow waters, given the likely need for increasing amphibious operations in the littoral. (Paragraph 195).

91. In the light of our experiences during Operation TELIC, we are incrementally improving our ability to conduct Mine Counter-Measure (MCM) operations in shallow and very shallow water. We have already established the Fleet Unmanned Underwater Vehicle Unit (FUUVU) with an interim capability. It completed training in January 2004 and has deployed operationally to Iraq in support of the Iraq Survey Group.

92. Building on the work done by the FUUVU, we will over the next five years, roll out a Mid-Term MCM Coherency package that will introduce additional Unmanned Underwater Vehicles (UUVs) into the Fleet, upgrade the command systems in the SANDOWN Minehunter and provide an improved Network Enabled Capability that will enable information to be shared electronically between ships and other Fleet units. These enhancements will improve significantly our current capability to undertake mine clearance in shallow and very shallow water. In the longer term we are developing a Future Mine-Countermeasures Capability that will:

- Further improve our ability to conduct operations in very shallow water (2m - 10m),
- Facilitate the greater exploitation of Unmanned Underwater Vehicles and remote MCM concepts, and
- Provide a more developed Network-Enabled Capability to the MCM Commander and improved frontline support to MCM units.

The approach to Basra

The operation to take Basra was a significant military achievement. One measure of its success—and in the context of an effects-based operation an important one—was that just one week later there were joint UK/Iraqi patrols. (Paragraph 202).

93. We agree that the operation to take Basra by UK forces was a significant military achievement. Their subsequent performance since that time, including both the mounting of joint UK/Iraqi patrols and their extensive training, mentoring and monitoring of the Iraqi security forces, has again demonstrated their professionalism and versatility.

Major Defence Equipment

Overall Performance

We are pleased to learn that in most cases the major defence equipments performed well in the difficult conditions encountered in Iraq although, given the nature of the enemy, many equipments were not tested to the full. (Paragraph 209).

94. The Department agrees that most of our defence equipment performed well in the challenging environmental conditions in Iraq. Although the Iraqis did not make the best use of their capabilities, that is something for which Coalition forces can take credit. The campaign plan was designed to overwhelm the regime, present it with a multiplicity of problems and disrupt its command and control capabilities. Clearly we were successful in this aim.

Availability of Equipment

The availability of most defence equipment was generally high during Operation TELIC. However, it is disappointing that an impressive capability such as HMS Ocean is let down by unreliable landing craft and ‘that there are difficulties with the acceptance of the new landing craft.’ We expect MOD to remedy this issue as soon as possible to ensure that the capabilities of HMS Ocean are maximised. (Paragraph 213).

95. The full complement of four landing craft (MK 5A LCVP) embarked from HMS OCEAN during Operation TELIC. Although problems were encountered with control of hydraulic and salt water cooling systems, work is now in hand to rectify these faults. The MK 5A LCVP Landing Craft is being replaced by the MK 5B craft. Whilst there were delays in the early stages of the build programme the total order of 16 craft was delivered and accepted into service on schedule (March 04).

Communication and Information Systems

It concerns us that for the next four to five years we will continue to be dependent upon Skynet 4 which has recognised limitations and which let us down on this occasion. (Paragraph 215).

96. It is not the case that Skynet 4 services will continue unchanged until replaced by a new Skynet 5 constellation of satellites in four or five years’ time. The Skynet 5 service provider (Paradigm Communications Services) took ownership and operational management of Skynet 4 space and ground assets in mid 2003 and is already introducing improved services. By early 2005 we expect to have a full Skynet 5 service operating over the existing Skynet 4 satellites and expect from around 2007 the service provider to be introducing new satellites.

97. Both current and planned satellite communications capability use military (Skynet) and commercial satellite communications as they offer different benefits according to the circumstances. The diversity that is offered by this approach has proved useful. One of the Skynet satellites did experience a problem briefly during the operation but the majority of communications traffic was transferred to other available satellites.

Operation TELIC highlighted serious shortcomings in the reliability, capacity and redundancy of the UK’s communications and information systems, which to a large extent are a consequence of under-investment in the past. While we acknowledge that work is in hand to address these shortcomings, we find it very worrying that it will be some time before any real improvements will be seen, particularly given the frequency with which UK Armed Forces are now involved in operations, and the increased need to communicate effectively not only within UK forces but also with our allies. (Paragraph 218).

98. The communications links used during operations in Iraq were carried over a diverse range of military and commercial satellite bearer systems. Additional capacity was available had it been needed. The total data bandwidth used during the operation exceeded that deployed for any previous overseas operation.

99. Difficulties lay not so much with the systems themselves but the gateways and interfaces between them. As explained in Lessons for the Future, some of these could not always cope with the volume of traffic. We are aware of the problems inherent in operating a variety of different communications systems and are developing the capability to manage our way round the inevitable difficulties encountered.

100. As well as improvements to satellite communications through the Skynet 5 programme, other communication infrastructure improvements will begin to come on stream from 2004. The achievement of In-Service Date (ISD) for the BOWMAN tactical radio system (ahead of target) was announced in March 2004 and the CORMORANT theatre system for connecting deployed headquarters is also due to come into service later this year. Both these systems have been developed for interoperability with the US and other allies as a key consideration by, for example, incorporating NATO standards.

Combat Identification

We welcome the overall finding of the National Audit Office that on Operation TELIC, the measures, procedures and training relating to combat identification were largely effective. We are disappointed that a copy of the review of combat identification undertaken by the Vice Chief of Defence Staff, which was provided to the National Audit Office, was not made available to the Defence Committee during its inquiry. (Paragraph 222).

101. We note the Committee's comments.

We expect MOD to make available to Parliament and the Committee the summaries of the conclusions of the reports of the Boards of Inquiry into individual blue on blue incidents as soon as possible and for the summaries to provide sufficient information on the causes of the incidents and the lessons learned in order to reassure the Armed Forces and ourselves that everything practicable was done to minimise the possibility of such incidents. (Paragraph 229).

102. We note the Committee's comments. We have indicated to Parliament that summaries of the conclusions of the Board of Inquiry reports will be made available to the Library of the House, but only when all other related proceedings are entirely complete.

We expect MOD to implement the lessons from Operation TELIC relating to combat identification. MOD should push forward with the work with its allies to agree on a single system. The latter is particularly important given that future UK military action is most likely to be as part of a Coalition. We note MOD's view that the opportunities for fratricide in an increasingly complex battle space are likely to increase, but look to MOD to identify the required action and make the necessary investment to ensure that such incidents are reduced to a minimum. (Paragraph 233).

103. The Department remains committed to improving combat effectiveness and minimising all casualties by improving Combat Identification among other measures. This will also minimise the risk of fratricide. Lessons identified from cases of fratricide during operations in Iraq will inform all three elements of Combat ID capability - situational awareness, target identification and tactics, techniques and procedures. We continue to

