



House of Commons
Committee of Public Accounts

**Ministry of Defence:
Operation TELIC —
United Kingdom
military operations in
Iraq**

**Thirty-ninth Report of
Session 2003–04**

*Report, together with formal minutes,
oral and written evidence*

*Ordered by The House of Commons
to be printed 21 July 2004*

HC 273
Published on 16 September 2004
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£12.00

The Committee of Public Accounts

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Summary

Introduction

Operation TELIC was the United Kingdom's contribution to the overall Coalition effort to remove Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime in Iraq in Spring 2003. It was the United Kingdom's largest operational military deployment since the 1990–91 Gulf War. The Operation involved the deployment of some 46,000 personnel, 19 warships, 14 Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels, 15,000 vehicles, 115 fixed-wing aircraft and nearly 100 helicopters. In addition, it was supported, in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, by large numbers of personnel from the Services, civilians and contractors. Within four weeks of hostilities beginning, United Kingdom forces had achieved their key military objectives, demonstrating the professionalism of our fighting forces.

The Operation took place against a background of concurrent operations and commitments, such as the continuing obligations in the Balkans, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Northern Ireland and the fire-fighters' strike. The Royal Air Force was also already over-flying northern and southern Iraq as part of the effort to enforce no-fly zones. In addition, the Royal Navy had maintained a continuous presence in the Gulf region enforcing United Nations sanctions against Iraq since 1991.

On the basis of a Report from the Comptroller and Auditor General,¹ we took evidence from the Ministry of Defence on four main issues: the Department's ability to deploy forces at short notice; logistics and shortages of equipment at the front line; the consignment tracking system; and the Department's process of identifying and implementing lessons.

1 C&AG's Report, *Operation TELIC – United Kingdom Military Operations in Iraq* (HC 60, Session 2003–04)

Conclusions and recommendations

- 1. The operation benefited considerably from the experience gained and lessons learned on Exercise Saif Sareea II which took place in Oman in 2001.** Operation TELIC demonstrated how valuable large-scale exercises such as Saif Sareea II can be. As the planning for Saif Sareea II demonstrated, exercises are often threatened with cancellation or are reduced in scope in the face of financial pressures elsewhere in the Defence budget. The priority given to exercises should be decided in the knowledge of the full costs and benefits, as a key element in maintaining military capability. The Department should analyse these factors when it considers its exercise programme each year.
- 2. The Department deployed a large, highly capable force to the Gulf in around 10 weeks, less than half the time that it had taken to send a broadly similar sized force for the 1990–91 Gulf War.** But the speed of deployment exposed areas where risks had been taken on how quickly gaps in capability, for example in stock holdings, could be made good. The management information that the Department uses to report its readiness to deploy forces should identify these gaps and how they could rapidly be made good if required.
- 3. A particular risk was the extent to which urgent purchases were expected to make up any shortfalls in stock and equipment levels.** The Department is now reviewing stock levels. In its review the Department should set a timetable for examining ways of engaging industry earlier in the pre-operational period to increase the likelihood that urgently purchased equipment and modifications are delivered to the frontline in good time. Such ways could include involving contractors in the early stages of planning an operation, early funding of some 'at risk' areas and provision in supply contracts for surges in production.
- 4. The Department needs to ensure security of supply.** The supply of ammunition for Underslung Grenade Launchers was potentially at risk when the Swiss Government withdrew its export licence. Although this incident had no impact on operational capability on this occasion, it serves to illustrate the potential vulnerability of United Kingdom supplies. The Department should identify any other cases where sourcing from overseas could put supplies at risk and seek alternative sources.
- 5. Equipment shortages at the front line exposed troops to increased risk.** As a result of a combination of shortages of initial stockholdings and serious weaknesses in logistic systems, troops at the frontline did not receive sufficient supplies of a range of important equipment including enhanced combat body armour and Nuclear, Biological and Chemical detection and protection systems. Troops should not be exposed to anticipated attack without the detection and protective equipment required for their defence.
- 6. Deficiencies in equipment management were exposed.** Equipment had not always been managed well. For example, the Department has issued 200,000 body armour components since 1999 but does not currently know their whereabouts. It is conducting an audit to establish their location. The entire stock of 4,000 Residual Vapour testing kits was unserviceable. The Department should re-examine how it

keeps track of small but important items such as body armour, including whether more items of kit should be designated as 'personal issue', for which the person issued with the kit is held accountable. The Department should also draw up, and undertake, a regular programme of testing the serviceability of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Warfare protection equipment.

7. **We were particularly concerned that armoured vehicles including the Challenger 2 tank did not have viable Nuclear, Biological and Chemical defence filters fitted and that operational filters had not been delivered by June 2003.** While we accept that armoured vehicle crews may have had recourse to their personal protective suits and respirators, we consider that both the wearing, and the robing and disrobing of such protective equipment whilst potentially under enemy fire, in hot conditions and within the relatively confined spaces of armoured vehicles such as the Challenger 2 tank, must inevitably seriously impair their operability and therefore the effective operation of weapons and instrumentation during battle. It is essential that Challenger 2 tanks are fitted with protective filters in future.
8. **Despite investing over £550 million since the first Gulf War in new computerised systems that include an asset management capability, the Department still lacks a credible consignment tracking system.** The absence of an effective consignment tracking system was a major reason why some equipment did not reach frontline troops when they needed it. The Department should consider whether it might be better to procure a system that meets essentials and can be introduced into service quickly rather than trying to develop a technically advanced bespoke system. As a minimum, a system should be able to track supplies to the store held by frontline units, provide frontline commanders with visibility of the progress of their consignments within the supply chain, and be supported by a dedicated communications system and fully trained personnel.
9. **United Kingdom forces played a valuable role in achieving improvements to conditions in southern Iraq immediately following hostilities but the handing over of responsibilities to civilian agencies needs to be better planned and carried out.** Planning for the post war period in Iraq had not been well developed, leaving British troops with much to do in the immediate aftermath of the fighting. The Department should draw up a protocol setting up agreed arrangements for full, early and continued consultation between all interested governmental, non-governmental and civilian agencies and contractors. It should also devise a scheme for the rapid deployment of civilian personnel or sponsored reserves and consider whether these arrangements should be practised in one of its exercises.
10. **The repeated identification of important logistics lessons since 1991, such as the absence of an adequate consignment tracking system, suggests fundamental shortcomings in the Department's ability to learn and act upon lessons from previous experience.** The Department should identify ways to prevent lessons identified in warfighting slipping down the list of priorities during peacetime, for example by specifically identifying and quantifying the risks that result if a lesson is not implemented, and assigning responsibility for implementation.
11. **Ordinary service men and women's experiences and perceptions of equipment shortages were often communicated through the media or through unofficial**

mechanisms. It is important for the experiences of those at the battlefield to be given weight and for personnel to feel that their views are valued. The Department should specifically canvass the opinions of personnel and should include the views of front line service men and women in their post operational reports.

1 The deployment and warfighting phases of Operation TELIC

1. Within four weeks of launching Operation TELIC, United Kingdom forces achieved their key military objectives. Key factors in this success included the speedy deployment of forces into theatre and a huge logistic effort. In general, equipment worked well. But above all, personnel at all levels performed impressively, demonstrating the professionalism of our fighting forces.²

2. Recent training and exercises played an important role in preparing troops for operations in Iraq. In particular, Exercise Saif Sareea II, undertaken in Oman in autumn 2001, proved invaluable in preparing troops and equipment for a potential warfighting operation in an austere, desert environment.³

3. Deployment was speedy. It was completed in less than 10 weeks, with the final deployment vessel arriving in Kuwait on 17 March, some 48 hours before hostilities began. **Figure 1** indicates that the United Kingdom deployed a force comprising a similar quantity of personnel and materiel, other than ammunition, as in the 1990–91 Gulf War. On this occasion, however, the Department completed the deployment in around half the time taken previously.⁴

Figure 1: Comparison of Land Forces personnel and material deployed to Kuwait in 1990–91 and 2003

A broadly similar sized force was deployed to theatre significantly more quickly than in the previous Gulf war

	Personnel	Vehicles	Ammunition (tonnes)	Shipping Containers	Deployment Time
1990–91	34,000	14,700	47,700	7181	22 weeks
2003	32,000	15,000	15,000	6804	10 weeks

Source: Ministry of Defence

Note: The 32,000 personnel and 6,800 containers were forces and equipment deployed into Kuwait. 46,000 personnel and 9,100 containers were deployed in total. The ammunition figure does not include Royal Air Force or Royal Navy stocks.

4. For a large-scale operation such as Operation TELIC, the Department's defence planning assumptions envisage that a task-force should be ready to deploy from its base or other location within 90 days of an order to do so. In the case of Operation TELIC, elements of the force were already at high readiness and were therefore available for earlier deployment. However, some units at lower readiness were required to deploy before their notice to move period had elapsed.⁵

2 C&AG's Report, Executive Summary paras 4–5, 9 and para 5.2

3 *ibid*, para 5.4

4 *ibid*, paras 2.2–2.3

5 *ibid*, para 2.2

5. The speed of deployment, however, exposed gaps in capability which had to be filled quickly. For example, the Department made a total of 194 urgent procurements needed to support warfighting worth £510 million, and operational sustainability purchases, to address stock shortages, worth £140 million. Shortfalls in stocks required spares and major assemblies to be removed from equipment not deployed to the Gulf.⁶

6. The speed of deployment depended upon the size of force that was required, the distances involved and the nature of the operation that was envisaged. Some forces, such as the Spearhead Battalion, were ready to go within hours of being put on notice to deploy, while other forces were held at graduated readiness requiring some months. The ability to deploy quickly also depended upon whether the Department could meet stock requirements from its own holdings or whether it needed to receive stocks from industry. The Department had arrangements with industry to hold only that stock that it would not be able to obtain from industry in the time available to it.⁷

7. In the case of Operation TELIC, the need to maintain operational security and the speed of deployment prevented the Department from engaging with industry early enough to allow all the required supplies to be delivered on time. This, in turn, resulted in some modifications to equipment, such as the AS 90 self-propelled gun, being fitted too late for the warfighting phase of the Operation, and limited the time available for troops to train and familiarise themselves with new weapons and equipment. The timing of the placing of orders with industry was subject to political decisions taken during the autumn and winter of 2002. Judgements had to be made about how much preparation could sensibly be done without being unhelpful to the overall diplomatic objectives that were at the forefront at that time. The Department had focused on advancing routine activity where there would have been no ambiguous signals. Activity more directly related to a war fighting intention had generally been approved later.⁸

8. One of the key lessons identified by the Department was that operational stock levels were, in many instances, not sufficient for the readiness and sustainability requirements of Operation TELIC. There was a risk of being too dependent on urgent purchases to make up for shortages of spares. While the Department could never hold enough stock for a large-scale operation, and would not seek to do so, in the light of its experience on Operation TELIC it was taking steps to increase stocks of certain long-lead items for the Challenger 2 tank, the AS 90 self-propelled gun and helicopters. It had also increased its holdings of combat clothing and boots, both for temperate and desert zones, and personal equipment such as Nuclear, Biological and Chemical protection and ration packs. The Department recognised, however, that it still needed to drive down the overall stock inventory to hold only what was likely to be required.⁹

9. In the case of Underslung Grenade Launchers, although the urgent action to procure ammunition had resulted in some rounds being delivered early and there had been no impact on operational capability, the final 10,000 rounds had not been delivered until 7 May 2003, after the main combat phase had ended, because the Swiss Government

6 C&AG's Report, Executive Summary para 6 and paras 2.4, 2.6

7 Qq 1, 111

8 C&AG's Report, paras 2.8c, 2.8e(i) and 2.8e(ii); Qq 2, 4

9 C&AG's Report, para 2.8b; Qq 112, 187

withdrew the export licence. As to whether the United Kingdom was vulnerable to interruption in the supply of ammunition for combat operations through dependence on other countries' manufacturers, the Department said it had a diversity of overseas suppliers to ensure access to stocks. In the specific case of underslung grenades, the Department had now built up a stockpile from other sources to reduce its reliance on Swiss supplies.¹⁰

10 Qq 131,181

2 Logistics and shortages of equipment at the front line

10. The logistic effort for Operation TELIC was crucial to overall success. Between January and April 2003, the Operation required 1,002 military and civilian transport flights and 113 ship movements. These deployed and sustained some 46,000 personnel, 9,103 shipping containers and 15,000 vehicles.¹¹ There were nevertheless shortfalls at the front line of some important equipment and supplies, notably: enhanced combat body armour; nuclear, biological and chemical defence equipment; and desert clothing and boots.¹² Not everyone who had needed enhanced combat body armour had received it, though the Department could not say how many people were affected in this way. Local commanders had prioritised the distribution of the body armour so that those troops going into combat, who needed it most, would have it. Forces in armoured vehicles were more protected than the infantry, so the distribution favoured the infantry.¹³

11. At the outset of planning for the Operation, conventional, rather than enhanced, body armour was seen as appropriate for the type of campaign that was expected. Every soldier was therefore equipped with conventional body armour. The aim was primarily to provide protection against fragmentation rather than ballistic injury. Enhanced combat body armour had been in use for a long time, essentially in peace support operations, for example in Northern Ireland, Kosovo and Afghanistan, where the requirement was to conduct static operations rather than manoeuvre warfare. At a relatively late stage of planning, however, it became apparent that troops would be fighting in built-up areas and that the ballistic protection offered by enhanced combat body armour would be required.¹⁴

12. The decision to equip the whole force with enhanced combat body armour was taken in late October 2002,¹⁵ before the Department abandoned their plans in late December 2002 to enter northern Iraq through Turkey in favour of entry into southern Iraq through the Al Faw peninsula. This change of plan involved rescoping the force to reflect the anticipated need to fight in built-up areas.¹⁶ The Department did not know, in October 2002, how much extra enhanced combat body armour would be required to meet the Army's needs, but the Defence Logistics Organisation issued 38,000 sets of this armour (each comprising four component parts) into theatre. Not all of this equipment reached frontline personnel. The Department estimated that since 1999 200,000 body armour components had been issued to units throughout the Armed Forces. There was no specific requirement for the Defence Logistics Organisation to track or recover body armour once issued. The Department had now instigated an audit to establish the location of component parts issued since 1999.¹⁷

11 C&AG's Report, Executive Summary para 9 and para 3.2

12 *ibid*, para 3.8 and Figure 6

13 Qq 92, 97

14 Qq 11, 134, 148

15 Q 7

16 Qq 9, 148

17 C&AG's Report, Figure 6; Qq 95, 97, 113, 120, 134

13. In the light of the experience of Operation TELIC, the Chiefs of Staff were considering whether enhanced combat body armour should be issued as personal equipment to be used on all operations. Should this decision be taken, the Department would move swiftly to implement it.¹⁸

14. On shortages of Nuclear, Biological and Chemical defence equipment, the Department had taken the threat of chemical attack seriously and, overall, there had been sufficient equipment in theatre to provide troops with adequate protection. It accepted, however, that there were deficiencies in individual elements of the protection offered and that it needed to continue to improve the equipment available.¹⁹ For example, there had been a 40% shortfall of Nerve Agent Immobilised Alarm and Detector units, and the entire stock of 4,000 Residual Vapour Detector kits, used by troops when unmasking following a chemical attack, was found to have been unserviceable at the time of deployment. The Department made good the shortfall in nerve agent detectors by requisitioning stocks from non-operational units, while subsequent tests of residual vapour detectors had declared 2,000 sets to be usable. In the event, therefore, there had been no shortage of monitors and detector units for combat operations. Everyone had at least one protective suit and a respirator and the Department had sought to ensure that a lot more were available in theatre, although it could not guarantee that people had received more than one suit each.²⁰

15. Armoured vehicles are routinely fitted with Nuclear, Biological and Chemical defence filters which are suitable for training, but not operational use. The operational filters are held in reserve and issued when required. But 7 Armoured Brigade's Challenger 2 tanks and other armoured vehicles did not have viable filters fitted throughout the warfighting phase of the Operation, and operational filters had still to be delivered to frontline units in late June 2003. At the outset of fighting, commanders had made the military judgement that the tanks were operationally effective and that filters were not needed. An armoured vehicle offered better protection than would be available to an infantryman because of its inherent mobility. People inside the armoured vehicles would have been protected to exactly the same level as an infantry soldier because they would have had individual protective equipment.²¹

16. Few troops received their full complement of desert clothing and boots on the Operation though in October 2002 we had been told, following Exercise Saif Sareea II, that the Department held sufficient stocks of desert boots. The Department said that its assurance was related to the stock holdings needed to equip a force for a medium-scale operation, as set out in its defence planning assumptions, which were in line with the Strategic Defence Review and the White Paper. In the event, the Department had more than enough boots and desert clothing to meet these planning assumptions. Operation TELIC was a large-scale operation, however, and the Department had needed to augment its stocks.²²

18 Q 97

19 C&AG's Report, Figure 6; Q 189

20 C&AG's Report, Figure 6; Qq 26, 65, 68–69, 188–189

21 C&AG's Report, Figure 6; Qq 28, 36, 44–45

22 C&AG's Report, Figure 6; 6th Report from the Committee of Public Accounts, *Exercise Saif Sareea II* (HC 502, Session 2002–03); Qq 7–8, 14–15

3 Consignment tracking

17. Consignment tracking is the term used to describe the Department's ability to monitor and locate materiel or major assets through the supply chain. Asset tracking is the term used to describe the ability to monitor the movement of individual components. The Department has identified the need to establish a coherent and effective consignment tracking capability on a number of previous occasions and this Committee has also reported on this issue when considering military operations in the 1991 Gulf War, the former Yugoslavia and Kosovo, and Exercise Saif Sareea II. The Department has cited affordability constraints and technical difficulties as the main reasons why this capability gap has not yet been addressed.²³

18. The absence of an effective consignment tracking system contributed to the logistics difficulties experienced on Operation TELIC. Difficulties in locating equipment in theatre contributed to some of the shortfalls at the frontline and led to frontline units sending teams back down the supply chain to identify their equipment or stores and to ensure that it was delivered to them in time. The lack of visibility of items within the supply chain led to a loss of confidence among military commanders that they would receive supplies when required, inefficiencies such as duplicate ordering, and some misappropriation of equipment and stores moving through the supply chain.²⁴

19. The Department accepted that it needed to have a better consignment tracking system and to improve the information available to the frontline. Since 1991, it had invested over £550 million in new computerised logistics systems and had procured new systems to improve consignment tracking. VITAL (Visibility In-Transit Asset Logging) was used by the Army and the Royal Air Force while RIDELS (Royal Navy Invoicing and Delivery System) was used by the Royal Navy. Both systems had been introduced into service in the mid-1990s. However, these were single Service systems. For expeditionary operations, which had become progressively more demanding, the Department needed access to integrated systems. The pursuit of an integrated system had been a priority for the Defence Logistics Organisation when it was set up in 2000. It had developed a programme to provide a solution, the Defence Stores Management Solution, but this had proved to be unaffordable and technically challenging.²⁵

20. Consultants later suggested a revised system which was deployed, in part, on Operation TELIC. The system was introduced in February 2003, too late to be utilised during the crucial early stages of deployment. The system is a radio frequency tagging system, manufactured in the United States, which shows the location of individual ISO containers. Individual land assets within the containers are tracked separately. The tagging system had enhanced the Department's ability to track consignments into theatre and had helped it to track stores, including medical supplies. It had linked well with the existing system (VITAL) used by the Army and the Royal Air Force and the Department now planned to make radio frequency tagging one of the elements of a better consignment tracking system

23 C&AG's Report, paras 3.17, 7.3 and Appendix C, pp 43–45; Q 137; Ev 25–28

24 *ibid*, paras 3.8–3.12, 3.16; Q 18

25 Qq 24–25, 158, 171; Ev 25

that was to be phased in over the next five years. To date, the Department had spent £7 million on the tagging system. The Defence Logistics Organisation had yet to determine the final cost of the planned consignment tracking system, and it had yet to be approved by Ministers.²⁶

21. The use of VITAL on deployed operations was limited because it lacked dedicated communications capability and sufficiently trained personnel. The replacement tri-Service consignment tracking system, known as In Transit Visibility, was part of the wider Defence Stores Management Solution that had been placed in abeyance on affordability grounds (**paragraph 19**). The Department had spent around £120 million on developing the Defence Stores Management Solution, including £6 million on the In Transit Visibility element, before it had been cancelled. The In Transit Visibility system would however be utilised in the new consignment tracking system that the Department was now developing.²⁷

22. On Operation TELIC, the Department could track consignments entering Kuwait up to the point in the Divisional supply chain where consignments were broken down into individual equipment for onward transmission to deployed units. It was at this stage that the Department had lost track of assets. The Department expected that the proposed incremental improvements to the consignment tracking system would provide frontline troops with more confidence through better asset visibility using enhanced information technology.²⁸

23. There were a number of shortfalls in the logistics infrastructure supporting the movement of consignments on Operation TELIC. The Department had experienced difficulties handling ISO containers, both in the United Kingdom and in theatre. Although it had procured an additional 20 container-handling vehicles to help to deal with over 9,100 containers used on the Operation, the unit responsible for offloading shipping in Kuwait had only three such vehicles to deal with several thousand containers. There was also a lack of suitable equipment to move and store supplies at the right temperature which resulted in some drugs and vaccines being thrown away since medical personnel had no confidence that they had been transported correctly. The Department agreed that it needed to review the transport of medicines, though there had been no shortfall in the provision of medicines to personnel and casualties.²⁹

26 C&AG's Report, para 3.19; Qq 25, 91, 99, 123, 139

27 *ibid*, para 3.18; Qq 158–162

28 Qq 108, 123, 139, 183

29 C&AG's Report, paras 3.14b, 3.14c; Q 178

4 Identifying and implementing lessons

24. The Department has developed a comprehensive process for identifying and capturing lessons arising from operations and exercises. In the case of Operation TELIC, the Department published a preliminary report in July 2003, followed by a final report on lessons from the Operation in December 2003. In total, the Department identified 429 separate lessons arising from the Operation.³⁰ A number of these lessons have been identified on previous operations and exercises. For example, some logistics lessons have recurred since 1996 (**Figure 2**). The need for better asset tracking has been an outstanding lesson since at least 1991.³¹

Figure 2: Logistics lessons on previous operations/exercises

Several important lessons about the performance of logistics systems have recurred since 1996

Operation / Exercise	Logistic shortcomings identified				
	Poor asset tracking	Poor logistic communications	Stock shortages	Priority deadlines not met	Lack of control over coupling bridge ³²
Operation RESOLUTE (Bosnia-Herzegovina 1995–1996)	✓	✓	✓		
Operation LODESTAR (Bosnia-Herzegovina 1996–1998)	✓	✓			
Operation AGRICOLA (Kosovo 1999)		✓	✓	✓	
Operation BESEMER (Macedonia 2001)	✓			✓	✓
Exercise Saif Sareea II (Oman 2001)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Operation TELIC (Iraq 2003)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Source: Ministry of Defence

30 C&AG's Report, para 7.2; Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq, First Reflections*, July 2003; Ministry of Defence, *Operations in Iraq, Lessons for the Future*, December 2003; Q 90

31 *ibid*, para 7.3

32 The coupling bridge refers to the logistical air, land and sea lanes which lie between the points of embarkation in the United Kingdom and the points of disembarkation in-theatre

25. The Department said that it was applying lessons as well as it could within a finite budget. It had, for example, applied lessons to the Operation from Exercise Saif Sareea II, such as on dust mitigation measures for Challenger 2 tanks. But it had to make judgements about priorities in relation to overall defence activity. The speed with which the Department could apply lessons depended upon factors such as the resources available and the difficulty of the technical solutions. For example, each of 25 recommendations arising from the Department's lessons learned study on Operation TELIC would cost over £100 million to implement, while another 50 recommendations would cost between £1 million and £100 million each to implement.³³

26. One feature of Operation TELIC was that ordinary service men and women's experiences and perceptions of equipment shortages were often communicated through the media or through unofficial mechanisms. It is important for the experiences of those at the battlefield to be given weight and for personnel to feel that their views are valued.³⁴

27. In filling the gap left by the disintegration of the Saddam regime, there was an initial absence of effective civilian Coalition structures, and of some aid agencies due to the poor security environment. United Kingdom forces had been instrumental in securing early and worthwhile improvements to conditions in southern Iraq. Coordinated plans to bridge the gap between what the Armed Forces achieved in the short-term and what was required to be done by others in the medium to longer term were not well developed.³⁵

28. In considering what more could have been done to ensure a smoother transition to peacekeeping, the Department said that conditions in Iraq had differed from expectations in two important respects. First, the Coalition had expected to need to provide more humanitarian aid than was the case and had been more geared to do that initially. Second, the level of degradation to the infrastructure, caused by decades of neglect, was greater than had been anticipated. As in other operations, civilian agencies that were needed quickly to restore normality to civilian life had been slow to become involved in Iraq. The Department was reviewing, with others, how pre-conflict coordination between the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Treasury might be improved. While the British Army had done well in implementing quick impact projects, the review was also considering how to involve civil institutions from the United Kingdom, the European Union and the United Nations. A report on what more should be done would be available later in the year.³⁶

33 Qq 90, 171

34 Qq 83, 106, 152, 192

35 C&AG's Report, paras 6.4, 6.6

36 Qq 190–191

Formal minutes

Wednesday 21 July 2004

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Allan	Mr Frank Field
Mr Richard Bacon	Mr Brian Jenkins
Mrs Angela Browning	Jim Sheridan
Jon Cruddas	Jon Trickett
Mr Ian Davidson	Mr Alan Williams

The Committee deliberated.

Draft Report (Ministry of Defence: Operation TELIC — United Kingdom military operations in Iraq), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 28 read and agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations read and agreed to.

Summary read and agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Thirty-ninth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chairman do make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That the provisions of Standing Order No. 134 (Select Committees (Reports)) be applied to the Report.

Adjourned until Wednesday 8 September at 3.30 pm

Witnesses

Wednesday 21 January 2004

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Sir Kevin Tebbit KCB CMG, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, **Lieutenant General Robert Fry CBE**, Deputy Chief Defence Staff (Commitments), and **Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger KCB**, Chief of Defence Logistics, Ministry of Defence

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List of written evidence

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Third Report	The Sheep Annual Premium Scheme	HC 64 (<i>Cm 6136</i>)
Fourth Report	Improving service delivery: the Forensic Science Service	HC 137 (<i>Cm 6155</i>)
Fifth Report	Warm Front: helping to combat fuel poverty	HC 206 (<i>Cm 6175</i>)
Sixth Report	Department of Trade and Industry: Regional Grants in England	HC 207 (<i>Cm 6155</i>)
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Oral evidence

Taken before the Committee of Public Accounts

on Wednesday 21 January 2004

Members present

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Richard Allan
Mr Richard Bacon
Mr Ian Davidson
Mr Brian Jenkins

Mr Siôn Simon
Mr Gerry Steinberg
Jon Trickett
Mr Alan Williams

Sir John Bourn KCB, Comptroller and Auditor General, National Audit Office, further examined.

Mr David Clarke, Director, National Audit Office, examined.

Mr Brian Glicksman, Treasury Officer of Accounts, HM Treasury, further examined.

REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL:

Ministry of Defence: Operation TELIC—United Kingdom Military Operations in Iraq (HC 60)

Witnesses: **Sir Kevin Tebbit KCB CMG**, Permanent Under-Secretary of State, **Lieutenant General Robert Fry CBE**, Deputy Chief Defence Staff (Commitments), and **Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger KCB**, Chief of Defence Logistics, Ministry of Defence, examined.

Q1 Chairman: Good afternoon and welcome to the Committee of Public Accounts where today we are looking at the Ministry of Defence, Operation TELIC, the United Kingdom military operations in Iraq and we are joined by, and we are very grateful to, our witnesses who are appearing before us this afternoon, being Sir Kevin Tebbit, who of course is the Permanent Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, Lieutenant General Robert Fry, who is Deputy Chief Defence Staff (Commitments), and Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger, who is Chief of Defence Logistics. We are very grateful to you, gentlemen, for agreeing to appear before us this afternoon. Perhaps I could start by putting this inquiry into context and to say that of course we recognise in this Committee that this was a significant military success and I say right at the start that we are very grateful for the hugely professional way in which our soldiers, airmen and sailors conducted themselves. Also to put the inquiry into focus, I start by looking at page 2 of the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report where he says, "We found that Operation TELIC was a significant military success, particularly in the deployment and combat phases", and over the page in paragraph 10 of the Report, he writes, "Overall the logistic effort was successful and key equipments, for example, the Challenger 2 tank which had experienced difficulties during Exercise Saif Sareea II performed well". I say that right at the beginning because I think it is important that we get that on the record, but of course it is the duty of this Committee to look at weaknesses as well and the impact they had on our soldiers, and the overall success of the effort cannot

hide particular weaknesses that this Report has thrown up and that is what we are here to try and investigate in as cool and calm a way as possible away from emotion and party-political debate. Sir Kevin, can I start with you please and refer you to paragraph 6 on page 2. I have already referred to page 2 and you will see there that paragraph 6 suggests that the speed of deployment exposed gaps in our capability. How ready are you to deploy at short notice?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: It depends upon the size of the force that is required to deploy, Mr Chairman, and the distance with which it is required to deploy and the type of operation envisaged. We have forces at very short notice. The spearhead battalion is ready to go within hours of being put on notice to go. We have other forces at graduated readiness requiring some months. It depends entirely on the type of operation and on whether we are expected to, and whether we feel we can, deal with it without the need for a graduated build-up and stocks being delivered from industry or whether we can do it with the stocks we have in our holdings. This depends entirely on the circumstances.

Q2 Chairman: So let's try and look at this in a bit more detail in relation to the particular operation and you will see if you look at paragraph 2.8c on page 14 that because of operational security and the speed of deployment, you could not engage with industry early enough to enable all the required supplies to be delivered on time. When did you give the go-ahead to your staff to place orders?

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Sir Kevin Tebbit: Well, that was a political decision and there were various points at various stages during the autumn and winter of 2002. The basic judgments that political authorities had to make was how much could be done by way of sensible preparation and how much would constitute an unhelpful development in relation to the overall diplomatic objectives which were in the forefront at that time. As you will recall, the hope was to bring Iraq into conformity with the Security Council Resolutions and until it was quite clear that they would not do so, until 1441 was passed and Saddam Hussein made clear that he was not prepared to comply with it, clearly there was a political inhibition correctly against preparations which made it clear that we would take a military route as opposed to a diplomatic one, so again there was a graduation of decision-making in that area as well.

Q3 Chairman: Well, let's look at this then because I specifically want to know when the go-ahead was given to your staff to place orders and let's look at one aspect of that. Now, you approved, did you not, the urgent operational requirement for modification to the Challenger in October, did you not? That cost some £17 million. We see that in Figure 5 on page 13, so that was approved in October.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: By the Secretary of State, yes.

Q4 Chairman: How did you approve this urgent modification in October and not approve the purchase of body armour and clothing?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I still need to explain the system. The urgent operational requirements were basically established by Permanent Joint Headquarters and the Defence Logistics Organisation. They were prioritised and centralised and they were put to ministers. Some activity could be done because it was a matter of doing what we would have been doing anyway to the full structure in the coming two or three years. It was a question of advancing routine activity where there would be absolutely no ambiguous signals given to anybody. Some, however, were much more directly related to a war-fighting intention and those were generally approved later. If you actually want a date, I think it was not until late November that the Secretary of State finally gave authorisation for pretty full military preparation.

Q5 Chairman: Right, there is a chronology here and the relevant date in the chronology, I think, is 25 November. Is that right?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: That sounds about right to me, Mr Chairman.

Q6 Chairman: So you had to wait until the 25 November—

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Not completely—

Q7 Chairman: Now, there were one or two costs, £3.5 million in total, a very small sum in Ministry of Defence terms. We see that in Figure 3 on page 12. The body armour cost £170 per set. Now, that is not very much in the context of the amount you spend

every day. Could you not have found a way to order and purchase these items sooner so that the safety of individual soldiers was not compromised?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Well, I think that is a rather loaded way of putting it, Mr Chairman. I do need to go back. Firstly, what stocks should we hold in normal peacetime operations on the shelf ready for contingencies? Those are decided by defence planning assumptions. They are based on a medium-scale operation. What was envisaged here eventually was not a medium-scale operation, it was a large-scale operation, so you are right, we would need, therefore, to augment our stocks by recourse to industry. Secondly, in terms of combat body armour, although everybody has always been issued for a long time with standard body armour, the decision to provide enhanced combat body armour for the whole force was not taken until late October, as I recall—

Q8 Chairman: Why not?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Because this was a military judgment and that judgment had not been made at that stage. There was already a very large amount of enhanced combat body armour held in units throughout the armed forces and the decision to actually issue urgent operational requirements followed after that, so there are various stages in answer to your question. Clothing, desert clothing, we did hold. The Defence Logistics Organisation did hold full stocks for the medium-scale requirement, as set out in our defence planning assumptions, that is to say, three suits for 9,000 people, so 27,000. They had an excess on top of that anyway, so it was not a deficiency in our holdings, but until we knew what size and scale of operation we would be involved in, and the actual decision about the size was not taken until well after this, it was not possible to know exactly what would be required.

Q9 Chairman: I want to ask General Fry this actually because he can answer me. As far as you are concerned, when were you given the order to deploy?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: We were given the order to deploy in various stages. The land package itself was not defined until early January, mid-January, and I think this is one of the key answers to the question that you posed a moment ago. It is absolutely impossible to decide how you equip the force until the force itself has been defined. You cannot define the force until you have a defined plan and it was not until just about over the Christmas period that we actually gave up in terms of planning for a northern entry through Turkey and into the north of Iraq. Now, that would have had sets of implications for the force that we would have deployed. It would have been essentially armoured rather than infantry-heavy, so until that point we were still looking at the 1 UK Armoured Division probably in its original configuration being very armour-heavy and that would also explain why the UORs of the Challenger had been made earlier. It was only then during a fairly hectic planning period in the first part of January that we entirely redefined the plan and rescoped the force which would then

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need to be infantry-heavy because we were looking at fighting in built-up areas throughout the Al Faw Peninsula and into Basra, so this was a process that was never refined on a single day as a result of a single process, but it constantly refined itself as the planning assumptions themselves changed.

Q10 Chairman: But we know that there were, looking at individual soldiers, shortages of kit at various times. Would it have helped you if you had been given more time to deploy, if the order had been given earlier?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: The answer to that self-evidently is yes, but I understand perfectly well the reasons why that was not possible in the circumstances.

Q11 Chairman: So your answer is yes. Can I ask you about the body armour and refer to what we know very well anyway, paragraph 3.8 on page 18, which shows that front-line troops were short of body armour and other equipment. What, in your view, General, was the impact of these shortfalls on your soldiers?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: I need to go back first of all and say what the policy was under which we deployed. Every soldier at the outset of planning was equipped with conventional body armour, not enhanced combat body armour. This reflected a doctrine that the armed forces had had for a long time, that the major protection we seek to give is against fragmentation injury rather than ballistic injury. Enhanced combat body armour has been in use for a long time, but essentially in peace support operations where the requirement is not to manoeuvre, but largely to conduct static operations. For example, it was first created in Northern Ireland as a counter-measure to sniper attack for people on static guard duty. We, therefore, took into the beginning of this conflict a doctrine which did not recognise the necessity for enhanced combat body armour and that is a perfectly legitimate position to start from. As we went into it, we saw a growing requirement for ballistic protection and, therefore, we initiated the urgent operational requirement procedure which then resulted in the knock-on procurement processes that derive from that. Therefore, to answer your question of what effect did I think it had upon the force, in the first instance they would all have been equipped to the mandatory standard that we took into the conflict. Thereafter enhanced combat body armour was introduced into the theatre and, as has been well recorded, not every man received a set of enhanced combat body armour and, therefore, there were differences within the force, but as far as the minimum levels of protection are concerned which we would define as conventional body armour, respirator and helmet, then there was universal fitment of the force.

Q12 Chairman: Now, we see from Figure 6 on page 19 that you issued over 32,000 items of body armour plates and then 21,000 covers into the supply chain by 24 March. How much of this was actually issued to units, say, by the fall of Basra?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: I cannot tell you. I do not have the figures and I do not think anyone would have those figures.

Q13 Chairman: Have you now been able to ascertain the track where this body armour was at any one time?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: There was a period when we did not have full visibility of all of the equipment, and this is not just enhanced combat body armour, that had entered theatre and that again is well recorded and is a result of the systems that we had being relatively over-taxed by the pure volume of the arrival of supplies and, therefore, it was not until some time later that we were able to entirely catch up with the logistic process.

Q14 Chairman: Well, other members will have to come back on this issue. You told this Committee in October 2002 that you had enough desert boots in stock, and this was following our comments on Exercise Saif Sareea, so what went wrong?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Nothing went wrong. Mr Chairman—

Q15 Chairman: So all the troops had the desert boots that they needed?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: You have not been listening, if I may say so, or maybe I have been misunderstood, Mr Chairman. Perhaps I should say generally, as there is a general point here that the Report often refers to shortfalls, that those shortfalls are references to the requirements of this particular operation. They are not shortfalls in relation to our defence planning assumptions and guidelines for holding of stock. When I said that we would have the correct stock, what I meant was that that would be in relation to medium-scale operations and that is basically how we equip our armed forces, how we maintain our readiness. It is in line with the Strategic Defence Review and the White Paper, so we had more than enough boots to meet our basic planning assumptions. We had to surge to a large-scale war-fighting operation and that required more, so there is no inconsistency between—

Q16 Chairman: Yes, but, as we see in this Report—
Sir Kevin Tebbit:—what I said then and what I say now.

Q17 Chairman:—as far as the soldiers on the ground were concerned, we see this in the Report, the difference in paragraph 3.9 on page 20, we see a chaotic picture of soldiers not knowing where kit was at a particular time. When will you have a system in place following the main lessons that this Committee has referred to again and again in previous conflicts to actually track kit so that you know where your kit is so that it is in the right place at the right time?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: That is a different point, if I may say so, Mr Chairman. I was explaining in answer to your question about what our normal stock holdings would be and I was explaining why we did hold those levels. There are various reasons why there was

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difficulty, I accept and we accepted in our report *Operations in Iraq: Lessons for the Future*, in having poor visibility of stocks in theatre. One is the technical and affordability problems we faced in putting in place a full IT system to enable us to do that, another is a better way of establishing, particularly for the Army because this did not apply to the Navy and the Air Force and it is quite interesting that they are not referred to in the Report, what wartime consumption rates are likely to be, and there is work going on in order to do that too. If you want me to answer the question of what we are doing to put in place a better in-transit visibility system and management of the deployed inventory, I am happy to comment now or at any other stage.

Chairman: Well, perhaps we will deal with that later in the hearing.

Q18 Mr Williams: Sir Kevin, if I had to summarise this Report, I would say all tribute to the military, despite the Department. Can I draw your attention to one sentence in the supplementary paper we received from the National Audit Office, which says, “The Department continued to lack an adequate consignment-tracking system and this lies at the root”, it lies at the root, “of difficulties and problems experienced in Iraq”. Now, do you agree that that was a major factor?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I agree that it was one of the major factors, yes. I did not agree with your first assertion.

Q19 Mr Williams: Well, that is not something you did agree, but the Report is something you had to agree. Now, if we then turn to page 37 and to table or diagram 12, there it deals with repeated identification of logistical lessons from previous campaigns. Now, let’s look at that. The very first one, lo and behold, it is poor asset-tracking and that was drawn to the attention of the Department after the problems in Bosnia in 1995/96. Correct?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Correct, yes.

Q20 Mr Williams: And it was drawn again to the attention of the Department again in Bosnia in Herzegovina in 1996–1998. Is that correct?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: That is correct, but you are reading from—

Q21 Mr Williams: And it was drawn again to the attention of the Department in Macedonia in 2001. Is that correct?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: That is correct.

Q22 Mr Williams: And then it was drawn again to the attention of the Department in Exercise Saif Sareea in 2001. Is that correct?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: If it is in the Report here and we have approved it, it is correct.

Q23 Mr Williams: Well, does it not sound either like neglect or incompetence that seven years after this was first a problem identified by the Department and

which had been repeatedly drawn to its attention in the intervening years, it is still a failure in this campaign?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I accept that there were shortcomings in our consignment-tracking capability. There are other factors involved in this. This is not the only one, but since you have mentioned it—

Q24 Mr Williams: Yes, but the important point is that we do not want to go off into peripherals. The NAO has identified it as key and I have just drawn your attention to a number of pages where you, the Department, have had this factor drawn to your attention and yet frankly, as I hope to demonstrate, you completely failed to address that problem in this particular campaign.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I would not agree with your second assertion. This is perhaps more a matter for the Chief of Defence Logistics and, by the way, this is not the Department and civil servants versus the military. The logistics and asset-tracking issues are just as much a military issue as they are a civilian one, if I may put it so, Mr Williams, but if I can go on, after 1991 the Department did procure new systems to improve consignment-tracking. The one used by the Army and the Air Force was called “VITAL 1” and the one by the Navy was called “RIDELS”. These were deployed during the mid-1990s, so it is not accurate to say that nothing was happening in this area. The trouble is that these were single-service systems and we needed progressively, when we had expeditionary operations, integrated systems that pulled together all three single-service inventories, took them out of their peacetime state, moved them across distances, more demanding distances now—

Q25 Mr Williams: We understand all of that.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Well, perhaps you would let me explain and I will continue, if I may, because you are asking me what we did and I am telling you what we did—deploying them in very demanding circumstances and they got progressively more demanding as we are going greater distances now. In 2000, when we set up the Defence Logistics Organisation, this was a priority and a programme was developed to provide the solution to this which proved to be unaffordable and technically very challenging, and it had to be suspended. We then had a review by McKinsey into the problem. They agreed that it was right to suspend it and came forward with a revised idea which we were working on in parallel which is now the system which we are deploying. We deployed some of it for this operation—

Q26 Mr Williams: But, Sir Kevin, despite all of that over seven years, if you turn to diagram 6, you find that there was a significant shortfall, some 40%, of nerve agent immobilised and detector units. For the troops who were supposed to be going in and possibly facing biological warfare, there was a severe

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shortfall in residual vapour detector kits. Some respirators did not fit as well as it had been presumed. Had anyone ever tried them on?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: This is nothing to do with consignment-tracking, Mr Williams. Those are different issues.

Q27 Mr Williams: Well, they are shortfalls in tracking.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: No, not necessarily.

Q28 Mr Williams: Let's take it a stage further. It has to be to do with tracking. Where was the stuff? Armoured vehicles were supposed to have nuclear, biological and chemical filters. These had not been delivered to the front line, so this is tracking, by late June when the National Audit Office went out there, a long time after the war was settled and they still had not been delivered, and the 7 armoured vehicles did not have nuclear, biological and chemical filters throughout the whole war-fighting phase of the operation. That is an appalling indictment of the Department sending men to war.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Are you asking me a question?

Q29 Mr Williams: Yes. Do you agree?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: No, I do not agree. The reason why we are having an interesting debate at this point is because you are, if I may suggest, placing too much emphasis on the consignment-tracking issue which I was trying to explain how we were dealing with. By the way, there is no other country that has solved this problem either, so that comparisons do not exist should be perhaps borne in mind. If only we could, but nobody else has tried to do this sort of thing. The answers to those issues of NAIADs and other CBW questions are not entirely about consignment-tracking, but they are about other factors too, as are the filters. The speed with which the deployment had to be mounted is one of the considerations that also bear on this. Had there been longer to prepare, had the troops had longer notice, then they would have been able to prepare more at home, they would have been able to take more with them and there would not have been such a rapid requirement to push things through a very limited port entry and airhead as there was. That is the other side to this.

Q30 Mr Williams: I am sorry, Sir Kevin, but that all sounds fine, but—

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am just telling you some of the other factors.

Q31 Mr Williams: I have understood what you are saying, that it is not just tracking. You are saying that it is also deployment, so let's look at deployment, page 14. Deployment scales required that there should be enough stores and supplies to sustain the forces for 30 to 60 days, but, and deployment is what you were trying to shelter behind, but, we are told, "the Department's methodology for estimating requirements of these supply levels is both outmoded and unclear", so it was not just that you were not tracking, but you were not even getting the right amounts of stuff to track.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am trying to shelter behind nothing. If you will allow me to finish, I will make another point, if I may. Military judgments also came into play in this area. Often the equipment was available to military commanders, but they had to make a choice: did they continue to train and work up their forces in the formations they wanted or did they stop and fit things like filters? That was one of the judgments they made. It is not entirely an asset-tracking issue or entirely a question of material not being in the theatre. The deployment scales issue that you mentioned is, I agree—

Q32 Mr Williams: Outmoded and unclear.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: That is not, I have to tell you, simply a matter for the Department. This is a problem that the Army faces because, unlike the Air Force and the Navy, they do not fight as they are organised in peacetime. Air Force units tend, by and large, to look the same when they are deployed as they are in peacetime, and naval ships are the same when they are deployed for warfare. The Army has to put together its operations as a sort of bespoke fit. It has meant that over the years the Army has found it very difficult to prescribe what it needs to sustain itself in various configurations. Work will now be done, and is being done, to improve on that. Perhaps I might ask the General to comment because this is not simply a Civil Service issue again.

Q33 Mr Williams: Well, there is a lovely phrase lower down in that paragraph. It says that, "Following an internal review in July 2003, the Department now intends to migrate from the current system . . ." Where did that word "migrate" come from, C&AG? Was that the Department's word or was that your word? What do you mean by "migrate"? Do you mean that you admit that you had a problem and you are having to change to another one?

Sir John Bourn: Move from one to the other.

Q34 Mr Williams: Removed from a bad one to one that they hope is a bit better. Was that word put in at your initiation or as part of the revision process with the Department?

Sir John Bourn: I think it was our word. It is a word in common use.

Q35 Mr Williams: Well, I am sorry to hear that, but I am so glad to hear that they are migrating.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: May I just say that when the word "Department" is used, you should not assume that this is the Department in conflict with the Armed Forces. It is the Armed Forces and the headquarters working together. This work is done by Headquarters Land Command working jointly with the Defence Logistics Organisation. Each year we review our logistics requirements and performance in relation to our defence plans. The last one was done in August 2003, it took into account this last operation and hence these lessons are being applied.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Mr Williams, would you like a word on the military judgment?

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Q36 Mr Williams: Yes, of course.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Taking the example of the NBC filters for armoured vehicles, and I think it is a good example, some of those filters did reach the front line and were available for fitment. Choices and decisions were made not to fit them and I think it was an entirely rational decision. Under any circumstances an armoured vehicle gives one far better protection because of its inherent mobility than would be available to an infantryman. The people inside those armoured vehicles would still be protected to exactly the same level as an infantry soldier because they would have individual protective equipment. Therefore, it seems to me entirely rational that decisions taken at the time were not to fit those filters, but to accept the fact that adequate protection was available because of a combination of military effect.

Q37 Mr Williams: In that case, why do we need filters?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Because under the best circumstances if one had infinite time to prepare and rehearse, one would fit them, but it is not a bloodless process. This is a very complicated affair.

Q38 Mr Williams: But you cannot have it both ways. Either they were needed or they were not needed. Either they provided extra protection or they did not. If they did not, then why on earth would we go to what must be substantial expense in providing them, and if they did and we had gone to that expense, why were they not available?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Because one can have one's cake and eat it so long as there is sufficient time for all of these things to happen. The evidence already given has shown that we work within very, very compressed time lines. There was an imperative to close to battle and that is what we observed.

The Committee suspended from 4.02 pm to 4.09 pm for a division in the House.

Q39 Jon Trickett: Can I pick this up where the last questioner left off on the question of filters. Why does the same table number 6 say that the NAO found that vehicle filters for Challenger 2 tanks had not been delivered to front-line units by late June after the war-fighting phase of the operation had ended?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: You mean why does it say it?

Q40 Jon Trickett: Yes, General Fry has just said that they were there.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: If I can clarify exactly what I did say, I said that some of them were there. I did not say all of them.

Q41 Jon Trickett: So were the filters for the Challenger 2 tanks available to be fitted during the war-fighting operation? I am only asking about the Challenger 2 tanks now and nothing else.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Some of them were. They were not all there.¹

Q42 Jon Trickett: Why did you agree to the statement that none of them had been delivered, as this document says?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I think at the time we were not aware that that was the case.

Q43 Jon Trickett: So you did not know whether the filters were there or not, and you agreed that they were not there even though actually they were?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: One of the values of having hearings such as this is that one can give even further information on the issues covered by the Report.

Q44 Jon Trickett: Would it not be better to correct that statement which is categorical before this meeting and do you not think it sounds preposterous to the nation that you do not know whether the filters are there or not and you agreed to a statement that they were not there when they actually were?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: If they had moved into unit holdings and had not been notified at that time, then when the NAO went there in June, they would not necessarily have known that they were there. A basic point is that when the tanks fought, the military judgment was taken that they were operationally effective and they had full operational capability—

Q45 Jon Trickett: I am going to ask you about that in a moment.

Sir Kevin Tebbit:—so, in short, it was not needed.

Q46 Jon Trickett: The fact is that you did not know they were there. You had no idea whether they were there or not and in fact you agreed to a statement that they were not there during the war-fighting operation.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: The Department did, yes.

Q47 Jon Trickett: Well, you did.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Yes.

Q48 Jon Trickett: You are the accounting officer. You are the person who signed this off, are you not, Sir Kevin?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Yes, indeed I am.

Q49 Jon Trickett: So do not shift the responsibility off on to the Department—

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am not, but I am delighted—

Q50 Jon Trickett: I just got the impression, and maybe other people did as well, that you were trying to.

¹ *Note by witness:* Lt Gen Fry accepts he has made a factual error here. Sufficient filters for Armoured Fighting Vehicles had been delivered into theatre before combat operations commenced. But operational priorities and short-comings with the in theatre asset tracking meant that not all of these were delivered forward in time for commencement of combat operations. This meant that whilst NBC filters were available for CVR(T) (2168 from 10 Mar 03) and Warrior (1511 from 22 Mar 03), this did not include NBC filters for Challenger II tanks.

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Sir Kevin Tebbit: No, I am delighted to be able to provide that further information, but there was no intention of misleading the NAO at the time.

Q51 Jon Trickett: You have now said to this Committee that a decision was taken not to fit the filters by the military.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am sorry, the General made that statement.

Q52 Jon Trickett: You disagreed with him?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I did not.

Q53 Jon Trickett: Do you agree with his statement?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I do not follow you. You are trying to make a distinction between what the General said and what I said—

Q54 Jon Trickett: Sorry, you are trying to make that distinction.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Not at all.

Q55 Jon Trickett: Well, do you agree with the statement that the military decided not to fit the filters for military reasons?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: That is the General's statement.

Q56 Jon Trickett: And do you agree with that?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Do you mean do I agree with their judgment or do I agree with his statement?

Q57 Jon Trickett: Well, why are you wriggling?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am not wriggling at all. I do not quite honestly know what it is you are trying to ask me.

Q58 Jon Trickett: Do you agree that it was a military decision not to fit the filters?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I agree with what the General said.

Q59 Jon Trickett: Well, you did not know whether the military had no idea or the Department did not and you said that there is no division between yourself and the military as to whether or not the filters were there. How was it then that they were able to make a decision not to fit the filters which they had no idea whether they were present or not? How can that be?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: A great deal of material was flowing into a war theatre, 42,000 people as a whole, 32,000 fighting men. A great deal was happening in a very compressed timescale in conditions of warfare. I would not expect, I have to make it clear, to receive reports on a daily basis of how many filters there were in theatre, neither indeed would the Chiefs of Staff, neither indeed would various levels below that. These are military judgments made progressively under command judgments and those command judgments, as the General said, were made.

Q60 Jon Trickett: Well, I just think that there is a real core to the answers which you yourselves have given and I am going to read carefully the verbatim record, but I want to move on. I personally was

never totally convinced that weapons of mass destruction actually existed in the hands of the Iraqis, but presumably the Department had a working hypothesis that these weapons may be used against our troops. The tanks were left without any protection, the vehicles themselves, against nuclear, biological or chemical warfare either because the filters were there, but nobody knew they were there or because the military knew they were there, and told the Committee they were not there, but decided not to use them in any event. I want just to pursue another matter. The fact of the matter is that you have had some detectors which were meant to identify whether there was a nuclear, biological or chemical presence in the atmosphere which our troops were breathing. Now, these detectors, you failed to deliver significant numbers of them, and I think there was a shortfall of 40%, but in fact the Department's entire stock of 4,000 was regarded as being unserviceable at the time. Now, this evokes the image, which I understand is true, of troops on the ground watching Scud missiles going overhead, not knowing whether those Scud missiles contained such weapons or not and having detector units which did not work or which were believed not to work. Is that the case?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: No. There was adequate, and indeed I think the Report confirms this word, NBC protection throughout.

Q61 Jon Trickett: No, it does not.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: There is a layered approach to NBC protection involving a variety of systems and this happened.

Q62 Jon Trickett: I am thinking about the alarm and detector units.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am sorry, but may I perhaps answer one or two questions?

Q63 Jon Trickett: Well, will you answer my questions and not questions which you pretend I have asked. I am asking about the detector units.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am here to help you. I am here to try to assist you to understand the issues.

Q64 Jon Trickett: And I am here to try to get the facts to the questions which I am asking and I am asking you about the detector units.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: You are now asking me about the detector units.

Q65 Jon Trickett: Well, I asked you before about the detector units.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: The shortfalls in detector units were made up before combat operations took place. There were adequate numbers in theatre. Although there were difficulties with the NAIAD (Nerve Agent Immobilised Enzyme Alarm and Detector) system, the Department realised that they were in a poor state in December and made up the shortfall by calling in stocks from non-operational units. Other supplies, in particular the chemical agent monitor, were used to make up the shortfall. All individuals of course had an NBC suit and a respirator, and

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what we are talking about here are the higher layers of warning and protection, so as a result of that, there was no shortage of monitors and detectors for combat operations and sufficient numbers were deployed.

Q66 Jon Trickett: Well, let me ask you about the detector units. Were the detector units serviceable or not at the time of deployment in the mind of the Department?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: There was no shortage for combat operations and sufficient were deployed.

Q67 Jon Trickett: I did not ask you that question. I asked you whether this thing here, which you signed up to, is true or not.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Could you refer to the—

Q68 Jon Trickett: It is the box which talks about detector units and it says that the Department regarded the entire stock of 4,000 detector kits as unserviceable. It is Figure 6, and it is the first paragraph in the box at the bottom right-hand corner of the page and it is the second sentence.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: At the time of deployment, but well before combat operations, so, in other words, the problem was rectified before combat operations started.

Q69 Jon Trickett: So the entire stock, and we are finally now getting the answer to the question which I am trying to get to, was regarded as unserviceable at the time of deployment. Now, can I ask you about the batteries which fired these things, as I understand it.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: It says that subsequent tests declared 2,000 of them—

Q70 Jon Trickett: Yes, it does say that, but—

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am just referring to the Report.

Q71 Jon Trickett: Everybody can read, and I am trying to establish whether that was the case. I want to move on because I have only two minutes left. I want to ask you about the batteries which I understand were required in order for these kits to work. Can you tell me whether there were sufficient batteries to fire up all of the detector kits?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: As far as I am aware, there were some problems with some batteries, but these were not operationally significant.

Q72 Jon Trickett: “A number of units reported shortages of necessary consumable items required for the effective operation of the... detector systems... These included batteries” and detector papers. The last sentence in that third paragraph in the same box says that units were having to turn off the kits in order to prolong the battery life. Do you not think that is disgraceful, that we go to war allegedly because weapons of mass destruction exist, and the troops must feel that they are going to be deployed at any moment and the NAO finds that the troops are having to turn off kit in order to safeguard battery life? Is that not disgraceful?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: The reports we received were that they were generally satisfactory. Although there were some problems, they were generally satisfactory.

Q73 Jon Trickett: Well, I have been told that my time is up, but is that last sentence correct—“The lack of these items prevented units from turning on these systems in order to preserve some reserve capability, amounting in some cases to between six and 24 hours worth of operation”? Is it not a fact that the troops were turning off the detector kits which were there to protect them in order to conserve battery life? Have you signed off that sentence?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Yes, you are making a general point from what I understand to be not an overall problem.

Q74 Jon Trickett: Have you agreed to that sentence or not?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Yes, and that does not contradict what I have just said.

Q75 Chairman: And this Report was published in December, was it not?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Indeed, alongside ours, Mr Chairman.

Q76 Chairman: So it is still not clear, just following that line of questioning, why a report published in December could not be corrected by you. There has been considerable publicity relating to this aspect of the Report, that “we found that these vehicle filters (for both Challenger 2 and other armoured vehicles) had not been delivered to the frontline units by the time of our field visit”. There has been considerable publicity about that and there has been a large debate in the House last week, so it is not clear to me why, if this statement is wrong, which you are now saying it is—

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am not saying that, Mr Chairman. This referred to a number of units. I am saying that it was generally okay.

Q77 Chairman: It was generally okay?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Yes, indeed, satisfactory.

Q78 Chairman: But that is not the message which is written here in this Report which you agreed and which was agreed as late as December.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Sorry, it says a number of units reported these shortages. I am saying that my information is that the situation was generally satisfactory.

Q79 Mr Davidson: I wonder if I could ask Sir Malcolm, starting on page 21, paragraph 3.12, about the misappropriation of equipment as it was working its way through the system. Can you give me any indication of the scale of this misappropriation?

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Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: The plain and simple answer to that is no and again I think we are in danger of taking a specific example and building it into a generic issue.

Q80 Mr Davidson: Well, I was not assuming, I must confess, that this was a specific example only. The way in which paragraph 3.12 is worded, it does seem to me that it is a generic issue, that because of shortages, which we have already discussed, as things were coming through the system, they were not unnaturally being liberated by people who had the opportunity to do so. Now, what I am seeking to clarify is the scale of this.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: And again I think you have linked it to the wrong word. It was not because of shortages. It was because of a lack of confidence at the forward edge that these people would get what they had asked for at a particularly low level at the time they expected from a demand system. That demand system was not necessarily consistent with the operational commanders' priorities and all you see here are a few examples, therefore, of what I would call "interaction with a normal supply chain".

Q81 Mr Davidson: Indeed, but surely people had a lack of confidence because there were shortages and, therefore, they felt the need to take individual actions, as it were, to ensure they had the equipment. If you thought that the equipment was going to be there when you needed it, then you would not need to help yourself as it was going through. Can I just check with the C&AG whether or not this refers to a single incident, as seems to be being suggested, or whether or not this seems to be almost systemic?

Mr Clarke: We were told this by one of the brigadiers in charge of logistics out in Iraq and he did not refer to specific instances, but he did not give any figure for actually how widespread it was.

Q82 Mr Davidson: Which is why it is reasonable for me to ask yourself, Sir Malcolm, whether or not this is systemic or just isolated.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: It is a perfectly reasonable question, but what I am saying here is that it is the duty of confidence that we have to instil in the organisation, not deal with what I still call "interference with the supply chain", and that is working as best it can in the circumstances and to the operational commanders' priorities.

Q83 Mr Davidson: Well, can I just pick up then this question of confidence because, as a Member of Parliament who had constituents out in Iraq, I was being besieged, as I am sure many of my colleagues were, by the wives of soldiers who were reporting equipment shortages and they in turn were also telling other people in the constituency about equipment shortages, who were in turn telling other members of the armed forces out in the Gulf that there were equipment shortages, and in those circumstances I can well understand why some of them might seek to help themselves to things that were passing through, lest they found themselves

short when they got to the front. That does not seem to me to be just simply a one-off example, but it seems to indicate that the difficulties were widespread and I am surprised that you are almost in a sense not willing to accept that that is a difficulty which needs to be addressed.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: No, I am not at all. I am saying that we have to create a confidence here in that eventual user that the material will be available, but that is not the same as accepting that what was going on was not consistent with the operational commanders' priorities because it was and you have heard already that what we are doing here was preparing for a particular conflict, having set up various assumptions against a scenario and analysed those and put in place a push system to provide against that.

Q84 Mr Davidson: I think we are talking, as I understand it, about ordinary desert equipment as much as anything else, so boots, desert clothing, anything that went by people, if they did not have it, they were liberating it.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: I cannot come to that conclusion from this statement and I cannot come to it from what has been said.

Q85 Mr Davidson: Well, that is the point that I made originally about the scale of material which was misappropriated. You must have some indication then of what did not reach the front, what started off at the back and did not reach the front and presumably went walkabout in the middle. You must have some indication of the volume of that.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: And of course what we are still doing is we are learning exactly how large that was, but again this is an issue system. These things are issued either to units or to individuals and they are not then lost to the system, but you do not then necessarily go through every individual.

Q86 Mr Davidson: If you came in here with a raincoat and hung it up outside and I took it, and then whilst it is true that it may have been issued to you and I then borrowed it, it is not entirely lost to the British system, no, but it is not being utilised in the manner that was entirely intended, so this misappropriation by staff of equipment means yes, it is still within the armed forces, but you must then have been short of stuff that did not reach the front.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: But you are missing the first point of this. The reason you have got a raincoat is because you in those circumstances have decided and provided for it. What I am describing here is the operational commanders were deciding whether or not you needed that raincoat and we were fulfilling the requirements of that operational chain from the supply chain. Whether or not those entirely coincided then with the individuals' perceptions is a different matter.

Q87 Mr Davidson: Picking up the point about things disappearing en route, such as boots, it is a reasonable assumption that if you are in a desert

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climate, you would want to have desert boots and many of the troops who were out there did not and they were, as I understand it, liberating it as it was moving forward, so do you have any indication of the scale of that at all?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: No, I do not.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: May I just add that the reason for that is because it did not have a significant effect on the successful conduct of the operation or on the declaration by the commanders that they had full operational capability, so it obviously was not very significant because it was not affecting the basic objectives of the operation.

Q88 Mr Davidson: Well, I do understand that, particularly in relation to combat boots and clothing and what would be described as necessary, but not essential, equipment, and troops were undoubtedly inconvenienced considerably by it, but because of the excellence of the training and the preparation and morale and everything else, they were still able to do the job. I understand completely that it did not affect the eventual outcome, but you can also understand the impression that created at home because of the messages coming back. Can I ask about, on the same page, paragraph 3.14b, the second column there, which is just about the handling of containers because again the container-handling equipment would seem to me to be a choke point in these circumstances where it says that there were only three container-handling vehicles to deal with several thousand containers. Again, Sir Malcolm, that is presumably correct and presumably that resulted in considerable delays, so are there any lessons from that which have been learnt?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: There are huge advantages with using containers, especially where there are ISO (International Standards Organisation) standards because of our need to take up, for example, ships from trade and the linear metreage that then is available to you; but then, as you say, that then requires special handling equipment, but that special handling equipment was available at the point of loading and unloading. The inference here is that it has to be available at all points, but actually of course not all elements of the delivery process would not necessarily be dependent on the ability to handle ISO containers. The technical term is that they “break bulk” at a particular point in the supply chain.

Q89 Mr Davidson: Sorry, but the way in which I read this, and again maybe the NAO staff can enlighten me, it looked as if there were only three container-handling vehicles and that that in itself was a problem, otherwise why write it down? Is not the implication of this paragraph designed to lead us to come to that conclusion?

Mr Clarke: We understand that this was something that the staff on the ground identified as a problem, as they said in their own *Lessons Learned* Report.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I think that is absolutely fair. We did use something like 9,000 containers. The scale of this operation was massive and I think it is true, in addition to what the Chief of Defence Logistics has said, that it has shown that we need to review our capability to handle those big containers, even though it may not have been impacted at every point, but there could be some pretty big infrastructure issues here if we assume that we are going to need to move this amount regularly. There is big money in enlarging the infrastructure.

Q90 Mr Davidson: Can I just come back then, and it is partly relating to the point that Mr Williams raised. It relates to page 35, paragraph 7.3 where it says that a number of important lessons which have been identified have actually been identified on a whole number of previous occasions. It relates to asset-tracking and stock levels. What is puzzling me is how can we have confidence that you have learnt the lessons of this Report when you patently have not learnt the lessons of previous reports? We meet you on a fairly regular basis and the exchanges are always pretty similar, that everything is fine and we do not need to worry is the impression that you give us. Now, clearly when the lessons of previous cases have not been picked up, what other steps are there that we can take?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am not saying that everything is fine, of course I am not. We have something like 429 lessons from our own lessons which we are applying as well as we can, but we have a finite budget, and we have to make judgments about priorities in relation to the totality of what we are doing in defence each time, so the speed with which we can apply lessons depends on the resources available to defence, it depends on the difficulty of the technical solutions, it depends on timescales and on various factors, and it cannot all be done as quickly as we might wish. The confidence I can give you that we do apply our lessons is that I was here for a hearing on Saif Sareea and I said that we had learnt a lot of lessons from this exercise and we would be applying them in our force structure so that if we had to fight a war in the desert, we will have done so. There are many, many references in this Report to those lessons having been applied, whether it is on Challenger 2, dust-mitigation measures, and on logistics as well, deployable logistics, there are a number of areas, so I would say that the confidence you can have is that we do apply lessons where we can, but sometimes we have not got the resources to do them as quickly as we wish and sometimes they are genuinely difficult technical issues and sometimes, remember, we cannot be expected to maintain forces in normal peacetime circumstances for large-scale operations, with all the stocks that that would involve and the billions of pounds more in the defence budget.

Q91 Mr Davidson: I understand that, and we ought to find that you are giving us new lessons which will constantly be learned, then you move on, you then get new mistakes and you learn again. I think most of us here accept these things entirely, but I think I can understand why, particularly in relation to

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logistics, and maybe this is an issue for Sir Malcolm again, the same lessons seem constantly to come up about asset-tracking and stock levels, so can you understand why we are in despair?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: As Sir Kevin said earlier there is a whole series of initiatives run across the time scales you are identifying here. Where this has been a consistent message to the Ministry of Defence, it is not that we have not tried in the past to resolve this particular problem, it is still an on-going one. To suggest that an asset-tracking system on its own will produce nirvana and deal with the complexities and management of this supply chain in-theatre will be to mislead you. We have made significant changes in process, in organisation and in communication and underlining structures. We did introduce TAV(-) at the end which added greatly to our ability to be able to consignment track into theatre. There is a whole series of things here and no one else, no one else, gentlemen, has solved this in the way that you conceive it will then work to optimum effect down to the individual in all circumstances.

Chairman: We will stop that particular line of questioning there and thank you, Mr Davidson.

Q92 Mr Steinberg: Sir Kevin, I am very disappointed with the meeting this afternoon, I find your attitude not only arrogant and complacent but I think soldiers may have died because of some of the failures that your Department and the military failed to do. We are entitled to find out if those mistakes were made and people died because of them. Quite frankly I know it is beneath you to come to this meeting because you have been to other ones that are far more important but as far as I am concerned when you come here you should give us the courtesy of answering our questions, which I do not think you have doing as you should have been. How many people did not get the body armour that they needed?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I cannot answer that question, I do not know if the General can. I can give you some information round that issue.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: I cannot give you a definitive answer as far as that is concerned. When you talk about casualties this is not a trivial issue for me, I am soldier and it is something which matters to every—

Q93 Mr Steinberg: If I was a soldier led by some of the hierarchy I would be bloody worried, to be quite honest.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Can I just point out some of the figures that are involved here, we deployed 46,000 people into a theatre where we conducted war-fighting operations for five weeks. During the course of that operation the number of people who were killed as a result of enemy action numbers in single figures, this seems to me to be an extraordinary efficient act of warfare under any circumstances.

Q94 Mr Steinberg: Do you really think so, if somebody was killed because they did not have body armour do you think that is efficient? I do not.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: We went into this conflict with a doctrine that combat body armour was entirely appropriate for these sort of operations. We made a decision during the course of the operation we wanted to enhance that protection. There was then a certain amount of time available for us to get it forward and that was not sufficient to get to everybody. I think as far as the level of protection that we entered this operation with, we made initial assumptions which were entirely discharged.

Q95 Mr Steinberg: I find the attitude remarkable. All we are here to do is try and find out what went wrong, if anything went wrong, and make suggestions through the NAO to put things right. Frankly, the attitude is that nothing went particularly wrong and everything was hunky dory and it was a great victory. Yes, it was a great victory and I wrote down to congratulate you but I do not like the attitude we have had this afternoon on the basis of our questions which you feel we have no flaming right to ask, we have every right to ask them. In 1999, 200,000 sets of body armour were issued yet there was a shortage, where did they go to?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: To the units throughout the armed forces.

Q96 Mr Steinberg: Why did every single soldier not have body armour?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I really have tried to answer your questions and I am very disappointed you should speak to me in those tones.

Q97 Mr Steinberg: I have to say that it is not just my feeling.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am trying to answer them. Firstly we do not know the reason why individuals have died, there are Boards of Investigation to be held and I suggest we wait and hear the outcome of those before we draw those conclusions. Secondly, and I am not trying to be arrogant, I did explain that the Chief of the General Staff asked that enhanced combat body armour should be used for this operation, that was in October, before then there was no requirement for the logistics organisation to have a particular level mandated. However, since 1999 quite a large amount of enhanced combat body armour has been issued by the logistics organisation, they went to the units, they asked for it as they required it to make up their sets. Some of those units would have taken it with them into the theatre and they would have done that on their own basis, some of them would have flown with it, and they were given an increased weight allowance to do so, some of them would have crated it and sent it by sea, that would have been a unit consignment that went to the unit at the other end, they would have managed that under their own activity, and the Chief of Defence Logistics will confirm that. Nobody knew quite how much extra would be required to meet the request from the Army in the October but the DLO sent

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38,000 sets of enhanced combat body armour into theatre. We know it did not get to everybody and I am gravely concerned and sorry that it did not, of course I am, of course I am. Just as much as I was grateful that the Chairman said that much of these things had gone well, that was to do how the Civil Service organised itself as well as the Armed Forces. I know it was prioritised by the commanders on the ground so that those going into combat needing it most would have it. Forces in armoured vehicles were regarded as being more protected than the infantry so there was a redistribution in favour of the infantry. I know that is what happened, it is unfortunate that not everybody had it. Even today the Chiefs of Staff have still to decide whether they wish to mandate enhanced combat body armour for all operations, combat operations, or what. Once they make their decision we will move swiftly to implement that, Ministers will take a decision. This is not a resource issue. Although I am sorry some things were not there fast enough and asset-tracking was an aspect of this, the idea that we are complacent about this is complete wrong. I am trying to explain how it happened.²

Q98 Mr Steinberg: If we read the transcript after the meeting finishes you might find that I might be right in my suggestions. I am going to move on now, just slightly, on page 20, 3.10 “Figure 7 shows that only 8% of those items requested by units in the shortest timescales logged at the main logistics centre in Kuwait were delivered within the planned 48 hour period”. Are we saying that 8% of priority equipment that had been requested, which presumably includes body armour, 8% has to be delivered within 48 hours?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: No, we are not saying that. This diagram shows the standard priority system which the units would be operating. Because of the compressed time scales and the need to flow material very quickly into the areas there was an overriding policy set by the National Contingent Commander, Air Marshal Burridge, which he called the National Contingent Commander Priority List which overrode that system. Details of what that Commander’s override meant were established by what we call the Joint Forces Logistic Component Commander who broke it down into the individual elements of what that meant. Say the National Contingent Commander said, “in next 48 hours what I need above all is Command and Control Information System”, or anything else, the Joint Forces Logistic Component Commander would then work out what that meant in detail and the Defence the Logistics Organisation’s Operation Centre (DLOC) would manage that through from the United Kingdom or wherever else it had to be found into the theatre and into those who needed it as a superimposed activity. So there was an overriding priority on top of the ones that you see on page 20 which insured that supplies were pulled forward in the desired order and the overriding operational requirement is superimposed on this

system so the operation could be conducted satisfactory. There are various references to this throughout the Report, 3.6 on page 18 and 3.10 on page 20. But I think it is important to bring it out a little more clearly because otherwise there is a slightly misleading impression that priorities were not tracked through as clearly as they were. The priorities were two kinds, one was what the units were asking for and one was what the overall commander judged were the overriding requirements.

Q99 Mr Steinberg: You have spoken most of the time so I do not have much time to ask many more questions, I am reliably informed by certain members that the biggest problem in this conflict and in the Saif Sareea exercise and the first Gulf War was the transporting and delivering of supplies. This has not been tackled, as we heard earlier on in the meeting, and paragraph 7 seems to indicate that. I am told that the main reason for this is simply because you do not know where the goods are, you pack them, they are packed into ISO containers, transported, they are all mixed up and they actually get lost and you do not know where they are, they do not even have a simple bar code system to know where things are. All you have is a quartermaster with a wad of paper going through sheets of paper trying to find out what is in the ISO container and what that container is. This Report seems to indicate that is absolutely accurate. You are shaking your head, tell us why it is not accurate? Tell us why my information is wrong?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: There are several features of that description you have taken out of context, if I may. We have consignment-tracking, I described TAV(-), which is a radio system fixed to these ISO containers which shows where the ISO container is. Within those ISO containers the individual assets are tracked in the particular Land forces through VITAL. It is when you get it into theatre, when you have to break it down and move it forward that the complexities of the theatre, of the movement and of the prevailing operational circumstances make this such a challenge. That is not to say we do not have to solve it.

Q100 Mr Steinberg: All you have said is that I am right, nobody knows where it is. The press made out that our soldiers were fighting a battle with a lack of ammunition, when you read the Report that is not what was happening, that is not accurate, what was happening was they could not carry the ammunition, there was plenty but they could not carry it to the front because they had nothing to carry it in. The Report says that.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: That is not true.

Q101 Mr Steinberg: There was a lack of ammunition on the frontline, it was sitting there.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am not denying it. If you read the Report at 3.13 you will see here the words “a perception”. There may have been a perception but none of the reports coming from the commanders—

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Q102 Mr Steinberg: I said that, I said that, Sir Kevin.
Sir Kevin Tebbit:—said there was a shortage of ammunition.

Q103 Mr Steinberg: You accused Mr Trickett of not listening to you, you are not listening to me, I said that the press gave a perception there was no ammunition but there was plenty of ammunition. The reason why there was no ammunition on the frontline was because they could not get it there.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: No, no, no. It was on the frontline. The ammunition was on the frontline, Mr Steinberg.

Q104 Mr Steinberg: That is not what it says in the Report. Am I stupid or what? It says this, “it significantly limited the ability of the logistics unit to move ammunition to the frontline . . . ammunition shortages”. They did not have it because it was not there it was because it was back in storage because they could not get it to the frontline because there was nought to carry it in.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I can only go by what the commanders report.

Q105 Mr Steinberg: You signed up to this Report, Sir Kevin, and it says it.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I am talking about “perception”, this is why I emphasised the word “perception”. In reality there were no commanders who mentioned in their post-operation reports they had an ammunition shortage. Had they done so I am sure they would have said so. That is not to say there were not some difficulties in getting the ammunition around, I can understand that was true. There was not a difficulty that prevented it getting to the frontline. I am sorry this has become a heated exchange between us but I think there is a real point here to be clear about.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Mr Steinberg, can we move away from perception and look at military record, the process, the way in which readiness in-theatre was defined was according to certain sets of criteria and these were used by the commanders. They would make their checks against equipment, personnel, sustainability and command and control. We then had a system where we declared what we called full operational capability, and that was a declaration by commanders at various levels within the operation that they were entirely satisfied that they were able to undertake the operation. That declaration was made for all of the units and formations involved in the operation therefore commanders made their judgments (none of us had any reason to doubt the military veracity of the judgments that were made at that time).

Q106 Mr Steinberg: I am not disputing you are giving us the right information, all I can do is read the Report that was sent to us two weeks before an investigation, we read that Report and we draw our questions from the Report that we read. In this Report, I am not going to read it out again, it is claimed there with a no ammunition or there was a perception there was no ammunition on the frontline because you could not get it there. There

was plenty of ammunition behind the line but it was not being brought forward. We can only ask our questions on the basis of what we have in front of us. General Fry, can you respond to this, this is and article, it might be a load of rubbish, in the *Evening Post* from Swansea, it says, “a Swansea soldier serving in Iraq without bullets for his rifle for eight days claimed the body armour which was given did not fit him and it was in a poor state of repair. After eight days he was given bullets. His rifle was kept locked in a store-room when he was not on duty a 20 minute walk from his bunker”.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Mr Steinberg, I cannot exchange anecdotes with you. I have no idea of the provenance of what you have just read out or its accuracy. All I can say is that there are military structures with military judgments to take place which would not commit men to battle unless the commanders were satisfied with the circumstances in which that would happen.

Q107 Chairman: I am not sure we are any clearer after that line of questioning.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I would like to make a further point.

Q108 Chairman: We really have to clear this up. Sir Kevin, as I understand it you are saying in general that contrary to the perception given in this Report, particularly in paragraph 3.13, you are saying that at all significant times when troops were in action or in danger of being in action there was sufficient ammunition, is that what you are saying? This phrase here which you have signed up, “this significantly limited the ability of logistic units to move ammunition to the frontline and exacerbated a perception among troops that there were ammunition shortages”. That phrase does not ring true.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: What I am saying is that the post-operational reports from the commanders in no case mention ammunition shortages as having been an issue. I agree with you that it is rather odd that we have stories, anecdotes from individuals who say they did not have any bullets or many bullets and the two do not add up. I do not know whether that means there people in the rear areas who were not regarded as relevant to the operational mission who were not allocated ammunition by their commanders or what. All I can go by is that overall judgment we received from the military commanders. I may be able to help you further if you will allow me, Mr Chairman, I accept entirely that our asset-tracking and deployed inventory systems may have exacerbated a perception here because although we have visibility up to the place in Kuwait or Camp Fox, it is true that the deployed units up front as of today still do not have the same systems, so they cannot read those systems and know; “yes, my consignment has arrived there, I can see it on my IT screen, I know what is in it. I know in two or three days that it will be with me”. That is a real problem. I am trying to help Mr Steinberg here. As we field further iterations of our new system, the system we procured for this operation was very successful once

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we got it in, we will be incrementally improving it to do that sort of thing. That will then bring more confidence to the frontline. There is no silver bullet here but it will improve that situation. We have a phased programme to bring this system in. The reason you can have confidence because it is incremental growth, on what we have, rather than some totally new system. The Board and Ministers have still got to approve the funding in April in our general planning and budgetary round. When that is available I think it will help to resolve some of these difficulties of confidence and perception, which are not necessarily the same as reality.

Chairman: That is an important answer, we are grateful to you for that, it may allow us in our Report to make some positive suggestions. Thank you very much.

Q109 Mr Jenkins: Sir Kevin, you must feel under fire but our questions will not kill you.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I will really try and help.

Q110 Mr Jenkins: In the Report you said that you had to buy back all terrain mobility platforms which you sold off, you bought them back for a cost of 1.1 million, have you any idea when you sold these off how much you got for them? What was the loss?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I do not have that precise information with me but I will try and make that available.³

Q111 Mr Jenkins: I want the information, and I will tell you why I want it because you pride yourself, and rightly so, having a planned operation in place, where you can gear up to any type of conflict—we have had bigger conflicts which have taken longer and smaller conflicts, I understand that. What I would like to know is if you sold those platforms off in the previous six months, because anyone who knew what the Saif Sareea exercise was about must have realised we could have been in this situation. You were very accurate with your words, Sir Kevin, when you said that we did have sufficient boots, the only trouble was it is these politicians, because when we have sufficient boots we could have kitted up a full unit if we sent 5,000 or 10,000 but making us send 46,000 we did not anticipate that. It is the plan element that when we are going to send a force of that scale you know you have to have everyone in place and contact your suppliers so you then know a time scale and you can turnaround and say to the military, this is time scale we can deliver it in. That is our concern, that the planning although it was good it could have been improved because in previous reports we pointed it out to you that on a number of occasions where the difficulties were going to occur and they still occurred. You have pointed out on two occasions that when you get a lot of containers, particularly if you have a lot of material and landing equipment, to us that is a bit of a disappointment to be honest. Do you take that as fair comment?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I cannot say at the moment when we sold it, I knew we had to procure it back again. We did not know the scales of the operation that we were going to mount or when we would mount it. I will come back to our Defence Planning Assumptions, if I may, they are based on our ability to mount medium scale operations, not large scale operations. For large scale operations by and large to get a division moving will take 90 days to be ready. It has then to be transported and then trained up in theatre. We have arrangements with industry to only keep the things in our stock that we will not be able to generate in the time available for industrial production.

Q112 Mr Jenkins: I can tell you now, and this is breaking news, we are going to have to be much, much faster and shift many more people round the world at much shorter notice than we have in the past.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: As a result of this operation and as a result of our review in August last year we are taking some steps to increase stocks of certain long-lead items to do with Challenger II, to do with the AS90 gun and to do with helicopter spares. We cannot do it for everything because if we try to hold for large scale it would be prohibitively expensive. We do hold slightly higher stocks of combat clothing and boots both for temperate zones and for desert zones. We have procured quite a lot more of personal equipment, including NBC protection for individuals as well as ration packs. We have scaled-up some of our stores on that basis. We still need to drive down the overall stock inventory and make sure we hold what we are likely to need.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: Could I just give you an assurance that what you describe in terms of understanding the strategic base's ability to respond to these things and the *not planning cycle* that is an on-going discussion. Whilst you raise one particular question which of course will give you a particular answer. I suggest that a lot of the responses that you saw showed the efficacy of our earlier engagement in scenarios which we were then able to put in place.

Q113 Mr Jenkins: I am glad you have joined in, Sir Malcolm. I am glad of that assurance although I want another assurance now, since 1999 we have issued 200,000 body armour—I know Mr Davidson was on about when the truck goes by the odd Tommy picks an extra set of boots off, I am not particularly bothered about—I want you to give me an assurance that when we are fighting an enemy we are not fighting an enemy who is wearing body armour paid for by the British taxpayer? If you cannot find those 200,000 it might be down to large-scale pilfering, organised crime, resale back to terrorists. What assurances and guarantee are you going to give me we are not facing terrorists in this instance, organised groups fitted with British body armour?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: We are engaged in an exercise at the moment to show exactly who was issued with those 200,000

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component parts and that they still have them. As I say, this is an issue system currently, we will have to go through that process down through each individual issue and then amalgamate it to see whether or not the issues match the holdings. We do not currently recover it after issue. We are going through that exercise as we speak. Only when I have completed that will I be able to tell you whether or not I can guarantee the location of each of those procurements.

Q114 Mr Jenkins: These may actually be in storage.
Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: We know what we have on the shelf.

Q115 Mr Jenkins: The Report says they seem to have disappeared.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: The word “disappear” is wrong, they have been issued.

Q116 Mr Jenkins: The Report is wrong?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: I do not know where “disappeared” has come from, the interpretation is when it is issued it disappears; it disappears off the high level information system.

Q117 Mr Jenkins: It might be in service.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: I would rather expect that the great majority of it is in service, in fact I rather hope—

Q118 Mr Jenkins: The perception I have from this Report is there are 200,000 you cannot account for and yet you say you could account for it if it is in service and we could get the information back, that number may drop rapidly.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: We are in difficulty with the use of words, “account for” means certain things to certain people. What we have done is bought that number of component parts and have issued the large majority of it. Some of it that is still on the shelves we can still see on the information systems but the ones that have been issued tend to have been issued on a manual device.

Q119 Mr Jenkins: It was the manual device which recorded I think I am right in saying in the Kuwait depot and we logged in about 20% of stuff landing.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Mr Jenkins that is a slightly different point.

Q120 Mr Jenkins: I understand that you accept the point that the logistics system was old, creaky and needed to be updated.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: The disappearance is from the formal register which the DLO keep. They issue it to units and the units then use the body armour according to their requirement. That is in the sense of disappearing from the ledger, not in terms of disappearing from the Armed Forces. We are now doing an audit to see where all of it is.

Q121 Mr Jenkins: I have one or two more quick questions my time is run out unfortunately. There are two examples of contractors not wanting to be in the combat zone, have you re-appraised the use of contractors in this type of environment?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: We had two cases out of 180 companies so it was relatively low. Since then we have now used 500 contract companies, it is a pretty small figure. We did have a very clear policy for contractors before the operation started in February called our CONDO Policy, Contractors on Deployed Operations which should have set out what they could expect from us and what we expected from them. It worked very well overall and I think the performance of the contractors was very successful and the difficulties were minor. One accepts that individuals may have had concerns but it was two out of 180 companies that we used.

Q122 Mr Jenkins: Thank you. If I can go the post-conflict situation at the time when the British Army was expected to run things like the Central Bank in Basra, provide nursing, etc, a job which they do excellently, probably the best of any army in the world and I would not take it from them. Have we got out of that situation? We are not still running the Central Bank or these operations being handed over to other people?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Yes, we handed that over to other people and the appropriate and competent authorities are involved in that. I have to say we would try and do this better if we were to conduct this operation again tomorrow.

Q123 Mr Jenkins: I am going through this Report and the fact that we were originally going to go in through Turkey with the Americans and they requested that we were going to have to use a different log-in system. By reading the Report we assume for some reason, I do not know why, the Americans may be lending us the log-in system and then they pulled out of lending it, did we have to buy it?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: We wanted to buy it. When we were going in through Turkey with them they said it would be very sensible for us to have their system called Total Asset Visibility. When the Air Marshal talks about TAV this is what he is talking about. We originally intended to lease it but there were problems in setting up the lease in terms of the amount of information we could get from them on that basis because it is linked to their wider IT system so there was a security issue. We decided it was much better to buy it and they decided to sell it to us and we have now spent £7 million on it, phase one about £3.67 million, which was in place and work by February—too late I agree—and it actually helped us track stores which we had lost visibility of, medical stores and other stores. It works, it is good. We like it and therefore we are extending it. That is the system we have now procured and we are linking up to our existing system VITAL and the systems at the other end in the deployed inventory. The plan is to make TAV one of the elements of this better

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system with better asset visibility that I have been describing. It started as a lease, it has gone to a purchase and we are extending it.

Chairman: Thank you for that.

Q124 Mr Allan: Can I take you right back to the beginning when we talked about the political context and how and why decisions were made in terms of purchasing equipment and then starting the whole logistics operation, is it correct that had we started the purchasing earlier and had we started the logistics operation earlier we would have had better value for money and more equipment in the right place at the right time? That seems to be a common sense assumption to make.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: If we had longer to plan and prepare for the operation I think we certainly would have had more time, whether it would have about been more cost-effective I am not entirely sure because things were not unused, as it were, they were used for the sustainability phase if they were not used for the initial combat phase, or some things were returned and not needed or already used and were sent back to the United Kingdom. Our system has to work in both directions, unlike some. I would not know about cost-effective but generally speaking longer would have been better.

Q125 Mr Allan: In this House and in the media and everywhere we were talking about the scale of the operation, if you look at the predictions way before it started and when you read the Report it appears that we started the logistics operation later than we could have done given what eventually happened. Clearly there is a debate at the moment about whether those decisions were taken late for political reasons, you yourself alluded to that that there may have been a political view, it looked like we were definitely going to war.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: You could put it like that. I would prefer to say that this was not initially a decision to go to war, it was initially an attempt to bring Saddam Hussein into compliance with previous Security Council resolutions and resolve it diplomatically. The point at which it became clear that that was not going to work was obviously later than the beginning of some kind of military planning. The military planning which was put in place initially was limited in the hope, as I say, that there was still time for a diplomatic resolution.

Q126 Mr Allan: Given that people were sabre rattling at that stage you could argue that it would be money well spent if you buy some bigger sabres in order to rattle even if you followed the diplomatic route. How do you explain that, especially if it is a political decision done at a political level saying, "hold off buying anything because we are following this UN route and we do not want to be caught out" or are you giving instructions to get ready for an operation at which point you have to go out, place the orders and buy the kit?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: These are political judgments. Those political decisions were broadly taken in time to build and mount the operation. It is true the more time you have the better you can do it, that does not mean to say there was not enough time.

Q127 Mr Allan: You were not held back for political reasons or were you held back for political reasons?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: The operation was planned, broadly speaking, within the guidelines we hoped to have. We did not start with a date which said 20 March and then work backwards, nobody knew it was going to be 20 March, that was a political decision that was taken then as well.

Q128 Mr Allan: Nobody said to you in November or December whatever you do not go out and buy this kit because it is going to send out all the wrong signals?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: It was a graduated process, some kit being prepared earlier and some later.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: I want to make a very broad statement—throughout the year we make judgments about the right buying pattern within our training cycle, it is not as if suddenly we engage with industry on a whole new sequence of purchases. It is just not black and white, nothing was going on that might be applied in this particular circumstance. We spent all our time planning for conflict. The peculiarities of planning for this particular conflict where it was obvious were realised on that incremental scale.

Q129 Mr Allan: It was hinted at in the Report about where the money comes from, because decisions are taken late and military conflict has already started my understanding is that you get money from the Chancellor's piggy bank for Urgent Operational Requirements, it does not come from the Ministry of Defence's budget, can you be clear with the Committee that the fact that it comes not from the Ministry of Defence budget is not a factor in making this kind of decision, if we hold off buying this stuff until later then it is less damaging to our budget?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: We have been doing this for a long time with Treasury and there is a pretty sophisticated system.

Q130 Chairman: They would catch you if you tried to.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: We have urgent operational requirements and so-called operational sustainability funding, one is for big equipment and the other is for stores and supplies. I have no criticism of the way the Treasury approved the requests as they came forward. Again the approvals came in tranches as well. The earliest approval from the Treasury for funding came as early as September for some activities and finally in December for others. There was a continuous process.

Q131 Mr Allan: Again on this famous paragraph about the under slung grenade launchers, some ammunition was delivered early, the final 10,000 rounds were not delivered until 7 May 2003 because

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the Swiss Government withdrew the export licence. That is quite worrying, I wonder if you can clarify why the Swiss Government were refusing to export ammunition we needed for a military conflict and also what response we have had to that. We must be quite vulnerable if we are dependent on other countries for the ammunition we need for our combat operations.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: We have now built up our stockpile from a number of sources so that we are not reliant on Swiss sources.

Q132 Mr Allan: The reason for the Swiss refusing us?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I can only assume it would have been a political reason.

Q133 Mr Allan: Against the conflict with Iraq. Picking up Mr Jenkins point on this, the Report is quite clear it says that the 200,000 suits of body armour exceeded the theoretical requirement but these seem to have disappeared. I wonder if the NAO can clarify that? Does that mean you are saying there is no way we know whether they are with the army or not, we cannot just assume they are with the army, there is no record anywhere to say where they are.

Mr Clarke: We asked the section in the Ministry of Defence responsible for issuing or buying the body armour and they gave us this information that approximately 200,000 sets had been issued and it was them who said that it had disappeared, it was from their perspective.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: There are two words there. The Ministry of Defence said they had been issued and then there is an interpretation that by being issued they have disappeared.

Q134 Mr Allan: Either way we do not know where it is.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Perhaps I can help you very quickly here, some of these were enhanced combat body armour, that was originally procured for peacekeeping operations where people were static rather than warfighting and successful in Northern Ireland, used to some extent in Kosovo and to quite a large extent in Afghanistan. It was on that basis that the Chief of General Staff felt it would be helpful to have it more generally available for this operation. The fact that they were not being tracked so carefully before was because there was no specific requirement for the DLO to manage once they were issued. There was an issue to units, if you are going to go into peacekeeping wear your body armour.

Q135 Mr Allan: They are issued like socks but are a lot more expensive than socks.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Yes but still midway between what is totally personal and what is managed at a higher level.

Q136 Mr Allan: Can we clarify that guns are tracked more effectively than this? There is a phrase here which says that body armour should be included in

personal equipment, does that mean it is within a category like firearms, and so on? Do we have two categories?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: As you say it is a category issue and in this particular instance the word "disappeared" I find to be an unfortunate word. We have issued it and we are now involved in determining where all of those are. Having signatures either at unit level or at individual level.

Q137 Mr Allan: On the Total Asset Visibility system it does look spectacular, it looks like it was mandated to us by our US allies, we were going to come through the Turkey route and we thought we would borrow it and we then procured it. We have talked a lot about the fact that we do not have a decent asset-tracking system and we need to get one. It does seem odd we have procured one outside the normal procedures on the eve of battle rather than go through the procurement procedure and all of a sudden we have one, did this go through the gateway review process?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: Again I think we are danger of using all of the wrong words, TAV(-) is about consignment-tracking, asset-tracking is then down to the individual components.

Q138 Mr Allan: Was it procured in the normal fashion?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: It went through the original business case arrangements which were then approved internally.

Q139 Mr Allan: Competitive tender.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: No, no. It is a military application it is not a civil system so we are not obliged to go to general tender. The second thing is there was an immediate requirement, we were working together with the Americans it was sensible to have something which we could read as well as them and *vice versa*. You are quite right, it was procured under the pressure of preparation for this operation and we found that it was particularly good at linking up with our existing systems. The plan is, I say we, my logistics colleagues plan to put proposals to us that we should extend and expand this and build over the next five years a system which includes TAV and links up our existing systems with so-called smart IT front ends and the totality of that is likely to cost a figure which we are waiting to hear from the DLO and that will go through the normal procedures.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: We would not have been able to conduct the outflow through Turkey unless we had a system entirely compatible with the Americans because we would have been dependent on American logistic nodes, and remember that was the planning assumption we had at the time.

Mr Simon: Firstly on behalf of my constituents in Birmingham can I congratulate and thank you on and for an outstanding, successful operation. Secondly, at the risk of alienating my Parliamentary colleagues, who I fear do not like you very much, can I also congratulate you on what I think is a fundamentally excellent report. Can I also say I do not mean that it is militarily excellent, as is the

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common vernacular, but somehow despite the Department, because it seems to me that the Department and the departments are essentially invisible, quite high credit accrues to all. Having said which—

Chairman: I am sure Sir Kevin wants to stop you there.

Q140 Mr Simon: Earlier in the week on the radio I heard one of the BBC's leading political correspondents assert to the nation that the particular supply, or in this case withdrawal, of a single piece of kit, in this case enhanced combat body armour, to an individual serviceman on a single occasion was, and I quote "a matter of policy and therefore a matter for ministers". Sir Kevin is that true?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: That he said that.

Q141 Mr Simon: It is certainly true that he said it. Was he wise and well-founded to assert that to the nation?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I cannot comment on how ministers interpret ministerial responsibility, it has to be a matter for ministers. What I will say is this, the whole way in which this operation is planned is like any other operation and the commanders as they go about their preparations have, as the General has said, four things to monitor: Equipment, people, sustainability and command and control and these are monitored by them on a colour code system, red, amber and green. This is information fed up through the subordinate commands, to the National Contingent Commander and through him to the Chiefs of Staff Committee. When all of those indicators go green the Commander knows and the Commanders know and the Chiefs of Staff know that they have full operational capability, that is to say they are signalling they are ready in all areas to discharge the military task, they therefore say, "when you want to take a policy decision that is up to you but we are ready to go". What I can tell you is that all of that process was completed, that a week before 20 March the National Contingent Commander signalled to the Chief of Staff, I sit on that Committee so I know, that he expected to be ready, he was waiting for one element and that was for the up-armouring of the Challenger II tanks. He expected that to be completed but until that was done his colour was amber for equipment. Once that was done it went green and so as far as the Chiefs of Staff were concerned and I was concerned and the Secretary of State was concerned the military authorities had full operational capability and were ready to go. In making that decision they will have exercised a whole host of military judgments about risks, about balancing various issues, about whether to fit this extra bit of equipment here or to train a bit more, about whether to move out fast because of the incoming missiles from Saddam Hussein or whether to stay around and get a bit more equipment into the infantry, about how many people had to have what kit before it was right in their judgment to proceed. Those were military judgments made by them.

Q142 Mr Simon: Thank you, that was very enlightening. General Fry, you are the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff, I assume in which case that most of your time these days being so important is spent dealing with policy in which case can I you ask you, would you describe the issue on a single occasion of a single piece of kit to a single soldier as a matter of policy?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: There are several Deputy Chiefs of Defence Staff and I number myself among them. The way that you lead into this question was to give a backdrop of political commentary, I cannot give you a view on that, that is completely outside my remit.

Q143 Mr Simon: That was my question to Sir Kevin who although is not political in the way that we are political he might be deemed to be more political than one would expect you to be political that is why I did not give you any backdrop to my question to you, as a man who deals at the most senior level with military policy would you normally describe a single issue on a single occasion of a single piece of kit to a single soldier a matter of policy?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: No, I would not. I would say that as far as body armour is concerned matters of policy are important. I have tried to track those during the course of the account I gave earlier on. What we are looking at at the present time is whether ECBA does become mandatory universal issue or not.

Mr Simon: I understand that. If I have time I will come back to the question of doctrine. As well as the Deputy Chief of Defence Staff (Commitments) you are also the nearest thing I think from my perusal of the biographies to, with respect to your two colleagues, military intellectual on the panel.

Chairman: That is the end of your career!

Q144 Mr Simon: Having been in the service for 30 years as well as a degree in economics, you have done a stint at the Army Staff College in Camberley and achieved a distinction in your MA in war studies at Kings College, London in which case I would like to ask you some general questions which do have a bearing on this Report and on matters of interest to the Committee and the country: Is it possible in a warfighting situation to keep track of your kit that you might expected to do in a warehouse?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: On the basis of the introduction you just gave me this answer will come as a disappointment, no, of course it is not. Your question is rhetorical.

Q145 Mr Simon: It is rhetorical but it seems to me to be pertinent. Have British soldiers in your knowledge of military history ever in any warfighting context in the history of the United Kingdom or its related dominions always known where all their kit was?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: : No. There have been many examples when they have not.

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Q146 Mr Simon: Just for a bit of cross-referencing and control sampling, as far as you are aware have any warfighting forces of any country in the history of the world ever always known where all their kit was and had it all when they needed it?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: I suspect not.

Q147 Mr Simon: I suspect you may be right. Looking at the NAO's Report into the way the services dealt with this conflict, are there other instances in recent history, by which I mean this century, where warfighting operations have been discharged significantly more efficiently or where supply tracking in any of the things we have been discussing today have been discharged more efficiently than on this occasion?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: I do not know if I can. Can I give you some outline of the scale of the challenge. I have talked on several occasions about the fact we were planning at one stage to approach Iraq from an entirely different direction which would have led to entirely different logistic assumptions. We only finalised on the plan that we did eventually conduct pretty late in the day, that was not until the New Year of 2003. We then found ourselves with a significant logistic challenge, first of all we had to go right the way round the Saudi Arabian peninsula and through the Suez Canal in order to get there, which built a considerable amount of time into deployment. We then found ourselves in Kuwait and members of the Committee who visited Kuwait will know this is a tiny and highly congested country with two sea points of entry and a single airhead. We shared those very limited resources with a hugely larger American Army that was doing exactly the same thing at the same time. I think the direction which your question is leading is to give some evidence of the scale of the achievement, well I think it is rather greater than is publicly acknowledged

Q148 Mr Simon: I had a feeling that might be the case as well. Thank you. If I can ask one final question to you and then finish to one question to Sir Kevin. Going back to the doctrinal change, we started with the doctrine that ordinary body armour rather than enhanced combat body armour was appropriate and as conditions developed and doctrinal change occurred where it was deemed that in fact enhanced combat body armour ought to be more widely issued can you give us a little bit of information about what the changes in conditions were that led to that change in doctrine and why they were not predicted?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Traditionally and historically the majority of casualties in conventional warfare have always been inflicted by fragments rather than by direct fire weapons. Perhaps the apogee of this was the First World War. This has always been an enduring theme of large scale conventional conflict. To that extent protection against fragmentation, which conventional body armour does give you, was an entirely appropriate response. We then began to look at the circumstances in which we might be

fighting inside Iraq and it became increasingly apparent we would be fighting in built up areas. Fighting in built up areas reduces dramatically the effect of area weapons and increases the tendency for engagements to take place with individual ballistic engagements, it was that change that we could see begin to develop during the course of the planning that led to the emphasis on enhanced combat body armour. This, however, was not at the outset; this was relatively late in the day that we could begin to see with the sort of clarity that I have just described the direction in which this was going. We then had to get that into a logistic system which was as complicated as I have just outlined to you and with some of the limitations that the Report and we ourselves have already acknowledged.

Q149 Mr Simon: You might say that. Our whips tell us that if you knew what the NAO was going to be doing it would not be warfare.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Indeed and everybody would be doing it.

Q150 Mr Simon: Sir Kevin, finally, if I can go back to the beginning, my initial question perhaps was too big a question, certainly the answer was very long, very full, very interesting and extremely eloquent, I just wanted to give you an opportunity to revisit the question of whether you feel able to give a more concise and direct reply to the question, is it your judgement that the issue on a single occasion to a single soldier of a single piece of kit is a "matter of policy"?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I cannot give you a direct answer to that because there are a number of policy issues affecting that judgment. I know what you are getting at but I do not think I should be drawn any further than that.

Mr Simon: Okay.

Q151 Mr Bacon: May I apologise because I was absent, I was in an adjournment debate on a defence matter. I have tried to apprise myself of what has been going on, General Fry could you say what was the lowest number of bullets issued to a soldier at any one time?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: No, I could not.

Q152 Mr Bacon: A report in the *Sunday Telegraph* said some soldiers were sent into battle with as little as ten bullets, that is a report on 14 December 2003, is that incorrect?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: I do not know whether it is incorrect. All I can do is make a commentary on the circumstances in which people would have been committed to battle.

Q153 Mr Bacon: Is it possible that you can find out whether that is correct or not and send a note to the Committee.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: I will certainly do my best.⁴ This is an anecdotal report.

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Mr Bacon: There is an awful lot of anecdotal evidence, I am looking for hard evidence. Is it true that was the lowest number of bullets issued for a soldier at any one time, is that possible?

Q154 Chairman: Have you really promised a note on that?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: I have promised to do my best to find out.⁵ There is a difference between the lowest number of bullets ever issued to a soldier and actually committed to battle.

Q155 Mr Bacon: In battle, did soldiers go to battle with as few as ten bullets?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: I find that inconceivable. I will try and find you an exact answer.

Q156 Mr Bacon: In relation to the body armour matter is it a matter of policy, why were they not issued as a matter of personal kit? How near are you to a decision on when it will be, is it likely to be issued as standard kit and if so when will the decision be made?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: We are waiting for a recommendation from the Chiefs of Staff. My expectation is they will move in that direction. They do have an issue to weigh, quite literally, it is very heavy. The judgment is should it be issued as personal kit for everyone to lug round even if they are not going to be in circumstances where they are needed. That is the judgment they will make and make a recommendation. It is not a resource issue.

Q157 Mr Bacon: Sir Malcolm, you are the man I should ask questions about the tracking system to.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: If you must.

Q158 Mr Bacon: I must. On page 22 it says that VITAL was going to be replaced by a tri-service tracking system and it was based on abeyance and affordability grounds. I understand that ITV Intrinsic Visibility was the system that was being developed, is that the system that you refer to in that paragraph?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: One of the first endeavours after the formation of the DLO was to create the Defence Stores Management System part of which would then have depended on In Transit Visibility (ITV).

Q159 Mr Bacon: How much was spent on it ITV before it was cancelled?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I think it was about 6 million but it was not wasted.

Q160 Mr Bacon: It was cancelled on affordability grounds.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: In Transit Visibility was an element of a much the bigger system, DSMS Defence Stores Management System.

Q161 Mr Bacon: Before it was cancelled.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Before it finished the assessment phase after something like £120 million had been spent.

Q162 Mr Bacon: £120 million spent in total. Was the ITV included in it?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: That was included within it but not all of that was written off because the ITV has been folded in to this system we are talking about now.

Q163 Mr Bacon: We cannot have many experiences of IT systems folded into one another, is it not the case there were various attempts to get the tracking system right and the Ministry of Defence have let them get out of control and the cost has ballooned and it has been put to me that a Toyota would do perfectly well but the Ministry of Defence bought a Rolls Royce system.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: It was cancelled before it completed the assessment phase so it was not out of control but the totality was judged to be unaffordable so we did go for a less Rolls Royce system. Instead of looking for 100%, which would simply have been too costly to achieve, we have gone for 85%.

Q164 Mr Bacon: Why does the MoD insist on re-inventing the wheel? The Caterpillar company operates on a similar idea, they promise to deliver spare parts to any piece of Caterpillar equipment anywhere in the world in 48 hours, why can you not lift something off the shelf and make it work? Why for ten years are we getting huge stories of huge failures with tracking systems?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: If only it were that simple. We had an earlier discussion that tracking is not the totality. This has to be within a management system that recognises the environment in which this works. It is not a one-way system.

Q165 Mr Bacon: Do you mean bombs going off all over the place!

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: I also mean that we do not know where we are going to deploy.

Q166 Mr Bacon: It is possibly fairly quickly to figure out where are you going to deploy before you do, I can understand if the analogy were with Marks and Spencer stores being bombed or lorries on the M6 being bombed and Marks and Spencer having difficulty finding out where their clothes were but it is not. This is about going to a location like Kuwait, that was not particularly affected, in the pre-invasion, pre-shooting war, that all appears to be relatively simple and there are plenty of private sector examples that have worked, why can the MoD get it right?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: We can do that bit, we described it earlier.

Q167 Mr Bacon: There were Squaddies running round Kuwait opening consignments to find out what was in them.

⁵ Ev 24

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Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: What you are describing is therefore the entry into theatre. We just described earlier we have: TAV which is consignment tracking; and VITAL. Within those consignments we can register arrival in-theatre. A more complex thing is to deal in those combat circumstances with a moving target—

Q168 Mr Bacon: I appreciate combat will make it very difficult. I am really more interested in the pre-shooting bit, could you send us a note which basically sets out each of the systems attempts to improve tracking since the first Gulf War?⁶

Sir Kevin Tebbit: We have been discussing them. We have introduced systems such as VITAL.

Q169 Mr Bacon: Can you send us a note?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Some of the difficulties I had earlier were because I felt some of the comments were exaggerated, I did not mean they were unfounded. We accept that consignment tracking and the management of the deployed inventory is not working as well as it should be. We accept we had a beginning which we had to stop and move on to a different system. We now have a much better approach. Can I give one example which is not like the ones—

Q170 Mr Bacon: Can you put it in a note?⁷ I have two questions, one about combat identification, the Report identifies on page 28 that this remain a problem, a number of British servicemen were killed by friendly fire, can you say briefly what lessons have been learned? As our previous report said, when are we going to get to the point that this friendly fire thing is reduced because all that practically can be done has been done and plainly is has not worked at the moment.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: We take it very seriously. We worked very hard with the Americans before the operation on it. We also reviewed our performance after the operation and it was one of the key studies that were initiated immediately afterwards by Vice Chief of Defence Staff to see whether our approach was validated. We have made a copy of that review available to the NAO. Before the operation we procured 1,861 vehicle mounted and 5,000 dismounted for people combat ID sets which were specific to this operation. I will not detail how they work for obvious reasons. We also acquired the American Blue Forces tracking system which gives general situation awareness, which also helps, the cost was not enormous but we spent several million pounds on doing so. Our initial findings after the combat were that these systems are good and were good but there is still no simple, single solution from technology that training, tactics, procedures and exercises are still vital because in some of the tragic incidents that occurred combat ID was there and it was supposed to be operating and still the incidents happened. We believe, my military colleagues might comment, the answer lies in a combination of all of

these things, of appropriate systems, procedures, training, exercising with it and we are very concerned to proceed on that basis.

Q171 Mr Bacon: One final question, in the defence White Paper it talks about the Ministry of Defence in order to do the job of defending the United Kingdom it requires a clear focus on projecting forces further afield and even more quickly going to new, strange locations, and so on, are you satisfied with the present configuration of the MoD at present, resources for the MoD and indeed your systems are adequate for that purpose?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Within the current Defence Planning Assumptions we have I think we are doing extremely well. We fielded a force in less time within the parameters of our Defence Planning Assumptions. We did better than we should have done notwithstanding the weaknesses. What does that mean? There were still deficiencies. How can we make those good? We have a lessons learned study here. Some of the implementation of those lessons if we really want to get much faster with this size of force they will cost a great deal of money. Twenty-five of our recommendations in those studies would each cost over £100 million and another 50 of them would cost between £1 million and £100 million. The cost of being able to put a force of this size, 46,000 people, into battle in anything less than what we achieved, in less than four and a half months would be enormous. You pay your money and you take your choice. I believe we must get more efficient in some areas. I completely accept what is being said although I must say the language used has made it more combative than it should have done. I completely accept we have to get better at the consignment tracking and visibility to frontline of what is coming towards her. Just as they have to get better at telling us what they are going to want in advance so they have a better plan in place. Nevertheless to really be able to conduct expeditionary warfare with this size force more rapidly than we have managed on this occasion would be very expensive. That is not to say we cannot do it with smaller packages, 9,000 brigade level, medium scale, but this was a very large operation.

Q172 Mr Allan: Who are the suppliers of the TAV system?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: I cannot remember the name.

Mr Allan: If we can have a note on that, who the suppliers are.⁸

Q173 Mr Jenkins: Can I clarify something, Sir Malcolm in response to Mr Bacon you said we can track and we can log to a set point because in the Report, this is difficulty I am having, Kuwait, you only logged 30% in to Kuwait, into Camp Fox. You did not log 100% in to Camp Fox and from then on you did not even know what was in Camp Fox.

⁶ Ev 25–29

⁷ Ev 25–29

⁸ Ev 25–29

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Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: I did say we can.

Q174 Mr Jenkins: You can but you did not.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: We did not. There were lots of reasons why we did not least the volume and time, but we can.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: Our existing systems enable us to do it but they are slow, they need to be speeded up and that is what our programme will do.

Q175 Mr Jenkins: I suggest the answer you say we can is in fact we cannot. If you cannot meet the time, if you cannot meet this number of items then you cannot do it.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: That is where we need to speed it up, that is the plan.

Q176 Mr Jenkins: The second question, refrigeration vehicles for transporting things like medicine do you not think they should use VITAL as part of their consignment procedures?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: Where there are constraints on temperature controls, absolutely. Yes.

Q177 Mr Jenkins: If we send them to Kuwait do you think we should put them in refrigerated vehicles?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: Where these were the conditions of transport, they should have been.

Q178 Mr Jenkins: Why did we not?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: There were some cases we did not and I accept it was written off. As a result one of the lessons we learned and one of the things we need to look into is the transport of medical supplies. It did not mean there was any shortfall in the provision that we could give to people and casualties. You are quite right this happened but it happened at a time when responsibility for that switched from our medical people, as it were, to the Defence Logistics Organisation. It is one of the areas that we need to look at.

Q179 Mr Jenkins: Thank you for those assurances, I hope they never come before the Committee again.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: There is one important technical factor, the first question that you asked as far as the kit entering theatre was concerned, it was tracked as part of a Joint Forces Logistic Component and when we got to Camp Fox at the back end we lost full visibility, so the observation that we attempted to log 30% is in fact quite wrong.

Q180 Mr Steinberg: One quick question which follows from the question Mr Allan asked you, I seem to remember a long time ago at one of these meetings, Sir Kevin, we discussed the very thing that Mr Allan talk about, the supply of ammunition being taken away by a contractor, the question was asked, what would happen in a conflict situation if they decided not to give us the ammunition? I cannot

remember your answer at the time, it would be interesting to see what you said, can you remember that?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I do not recall the exact moment. I would probably have said that we would seek to have a multiplicity of suppliers, to make sure we had a variety of suppliers available to us so that we would be able to cope.

Q181 Mr Steinberg: Does this not prove that necessities such as the basic thing that you need in war, ammunition, should be manufactured in this country by our own work force for our own troops and not depend on foreign nations to supply it for us?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: We have a diversity of suppliers so we can ensure that we can get them from overseas, but clearly you have a point. I think a judgment would come into play depending on whether we could be sure of a wide supply base or not.

Q182 Mr Steinberg: I know the NAO are not researchers for us but I would interested if you can find that.

Sir John Bourn: I do recall the case.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I do not think it involved Switzerland.

Mr Steinberg: It involved Germany or France.

Q183 Mr Bacon: I did not hear Lieutenant General Fry's last answer, he said one assertion was not true.

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: I think the inference was being drawn that of the equipment that was sent to Kuwait only 30% was ever actually logged into the theatre, that is not correct. There were two intermediary logistic stages as it went to Kuwait. The first one was the Joint Force Logistics Component and that stage we had pretty much total visibility of what was arriving in theatre. We then went to the next stage, Camp Fox, that was part of a divisional supply chain between those two points and we went from a system where we had broad visibility of the numbers of larger equipment coming in to the point where we break those out into individual equipment. That was where our problems started. It would be erroneous to say that only 30% of the equipment sent to Kuwait was actually logged in in any formal sense.

Q184 Mr Bacon: On page 22 there is a graph showing the percentage of logging from store systems, for high priority items, this is Figure 8, it was less than 50% demands were logged, that was for high priority systems, the lower priority was below 10%. You are saying it is wrong to say, perhaps it is me, it was not at the front of one thing it was at the back of another thing. You are saying that you did, it was tracked into theatre and the moment theatre had to get to the next intermediary stage, if this graph is correct, you lost it. Is that right?

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Lieutenant General Robert Fry: Yes, that is right.

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: Store system three is what that is recording, I was talking about TAV and VITAL. That is why it will be misleading to talk about asset tracking in a broad statement. There were several components of this.

Q185 Mr Bacon: I am looking forward to your note on this.⁹

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: It is a different process.

Mr Bacon: If you can mention in your note all of the systems and all of the companies that were involved and how much money was spent on systems cancelled that would be very interesting.

Q186 Chairman: Sir Malcolm, do you recall your debate on 3.12, page 21 we left that hanging in the air. "... unauthorised removal of items as they moved through the chain towards the frontline served to further complicate the logistics process". Your point here was that in fact these were misappropriately authorised by somebody, is that correct?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: No, no. The evidence seemed to say that there was misappropriation. I was saying that we were trying to fulfil a requirement set by the operational commander but that the misappropriations were being done at a different level. There was not the same confidence at the two levels, and that is what we are dealing with.

Q187 Chairman: They were done at a lower level because of a lack of confidence. Can I go back to page 11 and look the 2.8 b, you will see that we note there were critical shortages and gaps in capability, "shortages of others, for example spares", which we have been known about for years, were we too dependent on urgent purchases to make up for the shortages?

Air Chief Marshal Sir Malcolm Pledger: I am looking at the page 11, paragraph 2.8 b.

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I do take the point. Yes, action was put in to meet the sustainability requirement through urgent UORs. We are, however, now looking at whether we should increase stockholdings instead and readiness levels in that particular area in light of our experience in TELIC. As I say, we can never hold enough stock for an operation of this size and would never seek to do so. There may be areas where we should do more, particularly for long-lead items. Holding stocks, as the NAO says, is expensive and we cannot do it all.

Q188 Chairman: Can I ask you about the nuclear and chemical suits debate, are you telling the Committee that at all material times troops who were in action or in danger of being in action were fully protected against chemical attack?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: My information is that everybody had one suit and respirator and we sought to ensure that a lot more than that was available in-theatre.

DLO had taken procurement action. I cannot guarantee that people had more than that. I do not know how many had two or three suits, they could not carry them with them, they would be held in the quarter master in units. The information that we had was that everyone had a suit and a respirator.

Q189 Chairman: It has been said in the media that the failure to provide some kits, some essential items of kit show that you did not really believe that our troops were in any danger of being placed under chemical attack, you are denying that, you are saying at all relevant times if such a chemical attack was launched they would have been adequately protected?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: We took the threat seriously. We expected that the people in Camp Fox thought they could come under chemical attack. There was a layered system to provide a warning of chemical attack using various systems, some of those were not up to scratch when they got them off the shelf, some had problems but enough were provided in-theatre for the overall NBC protection to be adequate and as the NAO said it was good. That does not mean to say there were not deficiencies in individual elements. These could be made good by this layered effect. We need to do better and to continue to improve our NBC equipment which we believe to be as good as anyone's in the world.

Q190 Chairman: There is one point I have to give you a chance to answer on, in our Report figures show the transition from warfighting to peacekeeping duty and there has been very little debate about that, I must give you a chance to give an answer, what more could have done to ensure a smoother transition because there has been criticism of your Department on this issue?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: What more could have been done? We were the junior partner in a coalition. What we did was in conjunction with the United States. You are right, two things were different than we expected, we expected to have to deliver more humanitarian aid than was the case, we and the rest of the coalition were more geared to do that initially. Secondly, we did not expect quite such devastation and lack of maintenance and infrastructure that we found. The level of degradation was greater than was anticipated. I think we learned that not just in this operation but also in others that it is always too slow in getting the civilian components round you, the NGOs, the civil contractors, the people who need to move quickly to restore normality to civilian life. The Armed Forces did a lot of that naturally because it was part of the security environment, if you make people's lives better security is enhanced as well as infrastructure. We are looking into that quite carefully, in the Number Ten Policy Unit, and the Permanent Secretaries Group to try to improve the Foreign Office Aid Departments and Treasury coordination before a conflict. I think we did very well indeed in the British Army with Quick Impact and that sort of thing but it would be better if we could get the civil institutions, not just in the UK but that UN and EU and we have proposals that we are

⁹ Commercial in confidence—not printed.

developing to do that. This spring we will have a report about what more we should do in the United Kingdom and we are trying to get our allies interested and various institutions interested to try to do that in a nutshell. In an ideal world a civil engineering contractor will have his own group of people ready to go in if there is an emergency just as we have forces ready to come registered and prepared to come in. The environment has to be safe but we do need to try and speed up that transition.

Q191 Mr Williams: Can I clarify one thing so that I do not misunderstand you, you referred to the level of degradation of assets and so on, what you did not make clear was whether that was the level of degradation which was inherited from the regime or the level of degradation that resulted from the war, I assume it was the former?

Sir Kevin Tebbit: I should have said, it was neglected for decades and we had not realised the condition of the infrastructure.

Q192 Chairman: We have had some very sophisticated answers and explanations, we have probably gone into a level of detail greater than

any previous public inquiry, having said that you know that the perceptions amongst ordinary soldiers' reports coming back are very different from the kind of explanations you have been giving us today in terms of the shortages they face, ammunition, body armour and the rest, are you listening enough to our soldiers and what they are saying to you?

Lieutenant General Robert Fry: I hope I am listening enough to know that is not the whole story. I have spoken to lots of people from my own Corps., people I know well and I have had quite different reports. I think that what we hear is things that we do not want to be reported, I think those do get reported for all sorts of reasons but what it does not take into account is a more general view of the way in which this war went. I think we have formal procedures within defence to pick up lessons and also at the end of the day in contrast to anybody else in the room, with the exception of Air Marshall Pledger I have to stare these people in the face. At the end of the day that is probably answer enough in itself.

Chairman: Thank you, Lieutenant General Robert Fry, Sir Malcolm and Sir Kevin. We recognise the great success of this operation and pay tribute to our troops, thank you very much.

Supplementary memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Defence

Question 110 (Mr Jenkins): When were the All Terrain Mobility Platforms sold, at what price and how much was lost on the buy-back?

The 36 All Terrain Mobility Platforms (ATMP) were sold, to Traction/SUPCAT through the Disposal Services Agency, in August 2001 for £126,000. They were bought back, having been totally refurbished, at a cost of £1.1 million, ie a difference of £974,000.

Questions 153 and 154 (Mr Bacon): Is it possible to find out whether troops were sent into battle with as little as ten bullets as was reported in the Sunday Telegraph on 14 December 2003?

This answer is focussed on the issue of ammunition provided to troops actually committed to battle and not to troops in second line activities. We have been assured by the Logistics Staff of 1(UK) Div that there were no reports of any single unit short of ammunition once it had crossed the Line of Departure. The Op TELIC logistics plan was drawn up to current, frontline, warfighting scales and over 23 million rounds of 5.56mm ball ammunition were delivered. This was well in excess of the projected requirement of all the units deployed. We have looked thoroughly into this and can confirm that no shortage of 5.56mm ammunition was reported by commanders on the ground to HQ 1(UK) Armoured Div during OP TELIC.

Several newspapers have recently carried stories that personnel have claimed that they did not have enough 5.56mm ammunition for their weapons (SA80 A2, Light Support Weapon and Minimi) when they crossed the Line of Departure for combat operations. Despite these persistent rumors, no shortages of 5.56mm ammunition were reported to HQ 1(UK) Armoured Div either prior to, or after crossing the Line of Departure by its subordinate brigades. While at times during the advance into Iraq, the logistic supply chain was stretched temporarily, we have found no evidence that individual units were left with insufficient ammunition.

The Ministry of Defence is not in a position to refute anonymous claims made by personnel that they lacked sufficient ammunition. In one case where the details have been made available, we have been able to confirm that the unit involved did have sufficient supplies of 5.56mm ammunition.

There was, however, one instance, reported by the Logistic Component Commander on 01 Feb 2003, well ahead of the decisive combat operation, of an inadequate supply of 5.56mm for force protection in Kuwait. This was resolved by re-allocating supplies already held by the RAF detachment in Ali Al Salem. This issue was complicated at the time by the lack of Rules of Engagement for force protection in Kuwait at that very early stage, but was not an issue of failure of the logistic system. Neither did it involve the commitment of soldiers to battle in combat operations.

Questions 168–169 (Mr Bacon): Information on what steps have been taken since the first Gulf war in trying to resolve asset tracking.

The information provided below describes the steps which have been taken since the first Gulf conflict in 1991.

The full background and project histories of the various attempts to develop tracking systems by the MOD, including the start date and cancellation date (if cancelled) for each project.

The names of all the projects eg VITAL, ITV, TAV and any others.

The history of attempts to achieve reliable tracking is complex because of its origins in single service arrangements. Military requirements are also more demanding than commercial systems, because of the challenging operational environments and because of the need for a “two way” supply chain to return unserviceable equipment to military depots and industry for repair.

Since the last Gulf conflict in 1991, the MOD has used a number of tracking systems. These include:

- (a) **Visibility In-Transit Asset Logging (VITAL)**, developed “in-house” in 1993–94. It interfaces with both warehouse and inventory systems and air movement information systems. VITAL is supported by complex software applications and an extensive communications infrastructure.
- (b) **RN Invoicing and Delivery Systems (RIDELS)**, developed in-house by the Royal Navy in 1990–93. RIDELS is confined to the simpler static environment of the Naval Bases and interfaces with both warehouse and inventory systems. It is also supported by complex software applications and an extensive communications infrastructure.
- (c) **Logistic IT System (LITS)**, designed specifically for the Air environment. There are two main contracts that make up the LITS project. The first is the Accelerated Phased Implementation contract which was intended to be the initial delivery of LITS. The contract was signed in June 1994 and lasts until 31 Dec 2004. The second is the Service Provision Arrangement contract which was the initial in-life support contract. The contract for this was signed in June 1994 and lasts until July 2004.
- (d) **UPKEEP** was an integrated stores and engineering IT system developed for the sea environment. The UPKEEP project was approved in December 1995 and EDS Defence Ltd were awarded the contract as the UPKEEP Systems integrator (USI). In 1998 the UPKEEP requirement was redefined to cover only stores in the shore environment and these sites were later converted to simplify the future transition to DSMS. The UPKEEP project ended in June 1999.
- (e) **Defence Stores Management Solution (DSMS), In Transit Visibility (ITV), Delivering the Requirement of Unit Material Management (DRUMM)**: The Defence Stores Management Solution (DSMS) Programme was introduced in 1998 in order to provide a unified Defence solution. This included tracking in the form of the In Transit Visibility (ITV) project. These programmes, together with Project DRUMM (Delivering the Requirement of Unit Materiel Management) and a payment and billing system (Purchase to Payment), swept up all of the business requirements of the defence supply chain and aimed to deliver it into a tri-Service expeditionary environment. DSMS was designed around a commercial off-the-shelf solution that would provide an optimised suite of IT packages with simple interchange of data between the separate specialised elements. DSMS was suspended in 2002 on grounds of affordability before reaching Main Gate approval.
- (f) **Management of Materiel in Transit (MMiT)**: This is the successor project. It is developing an end to end control process for consignment management. This will optimise the supply chain ensuring that operational priorities dictate the movement of materiel and will improve the speed and certainty of consignments whilst removing cost both in terms of movement assets need and lost stock in transit.
- (g) **US Total Asset Visibility (US TAV)**: Because early planning for Op TELIC assumed UK operations through Southern Turkey via a US operated Line of Communication (LoC), the UK decided to adopt elements of the US TAV (Total Asset Visibility) system In September 2002. This was to ensure that visibility (command and control) of UK materiel could be maintained as it passed along the US managed LoC. The acquisition strategy that was recommended was to use sufficient US equipment to meet the requirements of the “Northern LoC” and to link the technology to VITAL in order to take the opportunity to enhance its capability and introduce a degree of interoperability with the US. TAV(-) has genuinely enhanced consignment tracking capability and now offers an opportunity for further exploitation. The progressive way in which it was introduced, has offered many lessons and its integration with VITAL and RIDELS has greatly improved consignment tracking.

A clear explanation of the different types of tracking and the difference between them eg asset-tracking, consignment-tracking etc.

Asset tracking and consignment tracking are complementary activities. Consignment tracking describes the process of moving packages of material from the strategic base to the user, typically from a depot in the UK or Germany to a theatre of operations. “Consignments” (typically in ISO containers for sea transport)

are tracked into theatre where they are unloaded and the individual “assets” are then distributed to their required destinations. Asset tracking concerns the location of individual assets wherever they are in the supply chain, either as part of a larger consignment on its way to or from a theatre of operations or once it has been uploaded and sent on to its destination.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE SUPPLY CHAIN SINCE 1991

Supplementary

This paper serves as background context in response to questions raised by the Public Accounts Committee, which requested an outline of what steps the MOD has taken since the first Gulf War to improve the supply chain to operations and, specifically, resolve problems identified with tracking.¹

Since 1991, Defence has undergone transformation in response to the demands of the changing global security situation. Conditions demanded that British Armed Forces evolve from a large but relatively static defensive force to a lighter expeditionary one with flexible force structures, plans, organisation and processes to match. This upheaval placed upon Defence logistics and the supply chain a fundamental change in requirement that has demanded equally stretching alterations in strategy (what we do), process (how we do it) and organisation (who and what we do it with). Throughout this period, the UK has produced enduring operational successes that have been logistically supported, from East Timor to the Balkans and Africa. As early as 1993, the formation of the Royal Logistic Corps brought together responsibilities for key supply, transport, catering and other support functions. In parallel, changing how logistic formations provide intimate logistic support to the Army on the battlefield began; this work continues to evolve today to reflect actual and anticipated changes in Army force structures. The Defence Cost Studies in 1994, and the “*Front Line First*” work in 1997, further re-balanced logistic capability in favour of “teeth arms”.

The creation of the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) at Northwood in 1996 recognised the need to improve command and control of the diversity of operations. PJHQ provided a single command centre for joint operations (including logistics), co-ordinating for the first time the forward end of the defence supply chain across all 3 Services on deployed operations. As well as improving the management of deployed logistic support, the PJHQ integrated logistic planning with all other elements of joint operational planning.

The 1997/98 Strategic Defence Review (SDR) re-cast the UK’s Armed Forces to meet foreseen strategic operational requirements and identified logistic fragility and shortfalls, particularly in key capabilities within the supply chain. Significant logistic enhancements were successfully agreed.²

The Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO) was launched on 1 April 2000 and brought together the 3 separate Service logistic commands into one organisation, although it must be remembered that more than half the personnel engaged in logistics are outside the DLO, especially in the land and air environments. The DLO embraces direct responsibility for key elements of the defence supply chain operation, including some “Coupling Bridge”³ activities, although the Coupling Bridge itself is controlled by PJHQ.

The creation of the Warships Support Agency⁴ on 1 April 2001 removed a hitherto artificial split in the responsibilities of the organisations and has led to more coherent, cost-effective and streamlined support.

SDR and emerging doctrine also identified the need for a deployed joint organisation to manage in-theatre logistics. This was provided by evolving and building the Land environment’s Combat Service Support Groups⁵ into a Joint Force Logistic Component (JFLogC) which deployed on Op TELIC⁶ and was instrumental in preventing some of the logistic difficulties that were experienced in the first Gulf War.

Recent experiences in Iraq, and the MoD’s own End to End (E2E) Study, have re-affirmed the need for a responsive supply chain which provides end-to-end visibility for the tracking of consignments and assets for operations. At the Strategic level, the creation of the DLO Logistic Operations Centre,⁷ which provided the day-to-day management of Coupling Bridge activity to theatre and the employment of the Total Asset

¹ There was some confusion over the terms Asset Tracking and Consignment Tracking. To clarify, **Consignment Tracking** is the tracking of equipment consignments when prepared for, and in the process of, movement at any point in the supply chain. **Asset Tracking** is the means of providing timely and accurate information on the, status, identity, location and movement of units, personnel, equipment and materiel. This paper deals with consignment tracking.

² For example, organic strategic sea and airlift with the procurement of 6 RoRo vessels and the lease of 4 C17 transport aircraft, the provision of deployed support through Air Combat Service Support Units to enable a more expeditionary Air Component, and the re-brigading of Short-Range Air Defence assets (Rapier and Starstreak) under one joint support and training system.

³ The Coupling Bridge is the inter-theatre logistic link, including air and sea ports of embarkation in the home base, disembarkation in the theatre of operations, and the means of transport between them.

⁴ WSA was created out of the merger of the Ship Support Agency and the Naval Bases and Supply Agency.

⁵ The CSSGs were themselves an evolution from the first Gulf War’s Logistic Support Group, and deployed in support of UK contributions to Balkans operations with the UN’s Intervention Force (IFOR) and NATO’s Stabilisation Force (SFOR). Following lessons identified during IFOR and SFOR operations, the CSSGs were then restructured into Logistic Brigades for operations in Kosovo, and effectively provided the embryonic functionality of a JFLogC, supporting the Joint Helicopter Force and Air element at Pristina Airport.

⁶ With RAF-provided Air Combat Service Support Units and RN-provided Forward Logistic Sites under command. The JFLogC operates at the “Theatre” level. Close support to the deployed components is still provided by organic structures; the Royal Fleet Auxiliary for the RN, Divisional organisations for the Army, and Tactical Logistic Wings for the RAF.

⁷ Created in early Feb 03 for Operation TELIC and retained thereafter.

Visibility (-) (TAV(-)) system to enhance the capability of existing consignment tracking systems contributed in large measure to the improved running of the operational supply chain for Op TELIC. Additionally, specific arrangements were successfully put in place to enable the National Component Commander's logistic priorities to be fed directly into the supply chain on a daily basis. Therefore, since 1991, concerted and progressive improvements have been made to Armed Forces logistic structures to meet the changing operational needs.

TRACKING

The history of the struggle to achieve reliable tracking lies in the nature of the Department's business and that of MOD Information System (IS) and Information Technology (IT) development over the past 15 years. Whereas commerce largely runs its supply chains in a benign environment with fixed parameters of geography and scale, the military operates in austere and challenging environments, often with poor communications and requirements that can vary due to external influences, such as enemy activity. Furthermore, the defence supply chain, by virtue of its origins, has been developed on single-Service lines with its own bespoke IT enablers tailored to the logistic support architecture of each Service. Unlike most commercial supply chains, it is also "two way" because of the need to return unserviceable equipment to military depots and industry for repair. We know of no commercial IT systems that can meet this demanding requirement whilst interfacing with the MoD's bespoke, inventory management systems.

The recent developments in expeditionary warfare have provided greater complications for logistics. Current tracking systems (VITAL⁸ and RIDELES⁹) resulted from lessons identified in the 1991 Gulf War and from an earlier 1989 NAO Freight Transport report. Both VITAL and RIDELES were seen as interim solutions, until such time as the single-Service logistic IS strategies (LITS¹⁰ for the Air environment, and UPKEEP¹¹ for the RN) assumed the required functionality. VITAL and RIDELES are both bespoke systems and are optimised for the Service in which they were introduced. Their development and use has differed as well; RIDELES is confined to the simpler static environment of the Naval Bases while VITAL, on the other hand, has been deployed forward into the operational environment where "surge" and the provision of adequate communications are much more demanding; indeed, the benefits of VITAL in Bosnia in 1992 were restricted due to the limited availability of appropriate communication bearers in-theatre. On grounds of the overall affordability of the LITS programme and the respective priorities for its component functions, the RAF decided in 1997 to adopt VITAL as its tracking system; limited roll-out to key transportation nodes and Main Operating Bases commenced in 1999. VITAL is not user friendly and requires urgent upgrade if it is to meet current and future needs.

In order to provide a single system to replace the existing Royal Navy, Royal Air Force and Army supply systems, and to provide a deployed inventory management capability, the Defence Stores Management Solution (DSMS) programme was introduced. As a complementary programme to DSMS, the In Transit Visibility (ITV) project was initiated, the intent of which was to provide a unified Defence solution to consignment tracking. These programmes, together with Project DRUMM¹² (an asset and configuration management tool) and the P2P payment and billing system,¹³ were intended to embrace all the business requirements of the defence supply chain and aimed to deliver it into a tri-Service expeditionary environment. DSMS was designed around a commercial off-the-shelf solution that would provide an optimised suite of IT packages with simple interchange of data between the separate specialised elements. DSMS failed on grounds of affordability.

Tracking was reviewed by McKinsey in their 2002 Study for the DLO. They recommended a revised DLO Change Programme with a "de-scoped" asset tracking requirement. Given the suspension of DSMS, a new project, now known as Management of Materiel in Transit (MMiT), was initiated specifically to build upon the current tracking systems. Full replacement of existing systems was considered but, on grounds of affordability and the DLO's experience with DSMS, this was rejected as being unrealistic.

Op TELIC provided a further imperative to improve the MoD's tracking capability. Early planning for Op TELIC assumed a UK invasion of Iraq using "the northern option", through Southern Turkey via an extended coalition Line of Communication (LoC) that was to be operated by the US (EUCOM). In Sep 02,

⁸ The requirement for Project VITAL (Visibility In-Transit Asset Logging) originates from the Op GRANBY lessons identified process. VITAL was developed "in-house" in 1993-94 by the Army's Logistics Information Systems Agency (predecessors to Defence Communications Service Agency Logistic Applications Integrated Project Team (LAIPT)). LAIPT have maintained VITAL since 1997 in a partnership arrangement with EDS within an overarching 10-year contract to support a wide range of Land Logistic IS.

⁹ The requirement for Project RIDELES (RN Invoicing and Delivery Systems) originates from work in the late 1980s. RIDELES was developed in-house by the RN between 1990-93 with external assistance being required during 1990-91 for invoicing business process analysis only. All subsequent management and system development has been conducted in-house under control of the DLO's Defence Support Chain staffs.

¹⁰ Logistics Information Technology System; unified IS strategy for maintenance and supply activity.

¹¹ UPKEEP was the working title of the RN IS strategy for maintenance and supply activity. The project ended in June 1999.

¹² Delivering the Requirement of Unit Materiel Management (DRUMM). The project started in Nov 1998 and was suspended in May 2002 on grounds of affordability.

¹³ Purchase-to-Payment system; facilitates online ordering, receipting and authorisation of supplier payment based on submission of commercial invoices.

it was assessed as essential that elements of the US TAV¹⁴ system be adopted to ensure that visibility (command and control) of UK materiel could be maintained as it passed along the US-managed LoC. Using a common system for both UK and US tracking enabled the de-confliction of requirements and ensured a smooth flow.

To initiate this capability, PJHQ raised an Urgent Operational Requirement (UOR) to acquire the necessary equipment through a loan and, concurrently, engaged the DLO to address the issue of integration with VITAL and RIDELS. Both VITAL (now used by the RAF as well as the Army) and RIDELS are embedded in logistic processes and connect into the Department's warehouse and inventory systems.¹⁵ VITAL also has a limited interface with other air movement information systems. Both VITAL and RIDELS are supported by complex software applications and extensive communications infrastructures. Given this, and the very short in-service date (then "early Jan 03"), neither VITAL nor RIDELS could be discarded and replaced by a complex and completely new system which would require training, integration, a communications infrastructure and "matching" to the way that we do business.

Thus, the acquisition strategy that was recommended was to use sufficient US equipment, and sufficient only,¹⁶ to meet the requirements of the "Northern LoC" and to link the technology to VITAL¹⁷ in order to take the opportunity to enhance its capability and introduce a degree of interoperability with the US.

The DLO commenced work in Oct 02, but it was not until 19 Nov 02 that the requirement was formally agreed between EUCOM and the PJHQ; this was required to invoke a loan of the TAV equipment under the ACSA.¹⁸ On receipt of the agreement, it was immediately clear that what had previously been seen as a "mandate" from EUCOM did little more than "strongly propose that the UK analyse the technology for UK use". PJHQ's advice was that this was insufficient to invoke the ACSA and acquire the technology through a loan. The following day (20 Nov 02), the DLO Contingency Planning Group met. It recognised the enhancement to capability that TAV(-) offered to VITAL, endorsed the acquisition strategy and took the decision that the equipment should be purchased as an Urgent Sustainability Requirement.

The completed Business Case was approved for expenditure on 6 Dec 02. In early Jan 03, DLO staff visited the Pentagon in order to de-conflict the UK's requirements for equipment with that of the US and discussed use of the US owned communications infrastructure. This was agreed and the contract was subsequently let with SAVI Technology on 23 Jan 03, with installation starting on 27 Jan 03, initial phased introduction in-theatre by 15 Feb 03, and the last phase completed by the end of Jul 03 to support redeployment and recovery of UK forces.

TAV(-) has genuinely enhanced deployed tracking capability and now offers an opportunity for further exploitation. The progressive way in which it was introduced, at the very same time that we were deploying and preparing for war, ensured that it was successfully integrated with existing systems and offered a degree of interoperability with the US.

WAY AHEAD

In summary, since 1991, less than ideal solutions have been incrementally introduced to solve particular problems for particular theatres and conditions or single Service environments. Following Op TELIC lessons identified, the whole issue of tracking was re-examined. A report has sought Policy & Programmes Steering Group support for a package of capability that includes tracking, the retention of TAV(-), MMiT, extra logistic communications capability and Management of the Joint Deployed Inventory, the latter being an equally critical component of the required capability to provide visibility of inventory stocks across all 3 Services on a single system. This package would require funding from the EP,¹⁹ STP and DMF.²⁰ EP and STP funding options will be considered as part of the Departmental planning round against other priorities. If funded, this package of enhancements will provide a robust tracking capability achieved through an incremental strategy, and the ability to manage materiel flow to force elements using appropriate Joint management and single Service execution. The proposed programme of enhancements will still not offer a complete solution to Defence needs; however, they are realistic in scope and offer genuine prospect of improvements in the short term. The operational commander will, however, benefit significantly through greater visibility and a reduced logistic footprint, thus, improving his ability to fight.

¹⁴ Total Asset Visibility System.

¹⁵ With the exception of the RN's RIDELS, which does not connect with the RAF's Air inventory management system.

¹⁶ Hence, TAV(-) because it wasn't the full suite of capability.

¹⁷ It was envisaged that the LoC through Turkey would be not used by the RN and so it was not necessary to link the technology to RIDELS, although this has subsequently been integrated for the benefit of the Warship Support Agency and the RN.

¹⁸ Acquisition and Cross Servicing Agreement, established under the US-UK Memorandum of Understanding 01, dated 1996.

¹⁹ Equipment Programme.

²⁰ Defence Modernisation Fund.

Update of Paragraph 4.9 of the NAO Report:

Paragraph 4.9 of the National Audit Office's report "Operations in Iraq" noted an availability rate of 52% for the Lynx helicopter. This figure is believed to relate solely to low availability suffered by 3 Regt Army Air Corps (AAC) aircraft in the pre-warfighting work-up phase, mainly due to environmental conditions at and around the Ali Al Salem airbase. After deploying from Kuwait, conditions improved markedly and serviceability recovered to 65% during fighting operations. However, 657 Sqn AAC and 847 NAS Lynx were also operating Lynx Mk7 TOW aircraft (a total of 12 of the 22 Mk7 deployed), figures for which we believe have been excluded from the NAO's statistics. Composite figures show that Lynx TOW serviceability was at over 70% throughout the deployment. This was a satisfactory level, given that, due to the scheduled, preventative maintenance required on helicopters, 66% is the expected level of serviceability.

25 February 2004

Further supplementary memorandum submitted by the Ministry of Defence

I am writing further to the evidence given at the hearing on 21 January into the C&AG's Report "Op TELIC—UK Military Operations in Iraq" to clarify the position regarding Enhanced Combat Body Armour (ECBA). In evidence we confirmed that a significant amount of ECBA had been issued since 1999 and that an audit was underway to determine the whereabouts of this equipment, to improve on the statement in the C&AG's Report that "... approx. 200,000 sets [of ECBA] had been issued since the Kosovo campaign in 1999 ... but these seem to have disappeared."

The figure quoted in the C&AG's Report was an estimate provided for the NAO inquiry of the equivalent number of sets of body armour that would have been issued since 1999. However, the body armour ensemble is not usually issued as a complete set. Instead, units request the number of components required to make up the sets they need. A polycotton cover (UN blue, temperate or desert) and para-aramid filler form the standard Combat Body Armour (CBA); the addition of two ceramic plates (counted individually), and a different cover with pockets to hold the plates, creates ECBA.

As these components, once issued, are not tracked centrally, the Defence Logistics Organisation (DLO)—which is responsible for the supply of these items—cannot locate each individual set or components of a set, nor does it have a requirement to do so. In common with many other issued items, responsibility for retaining and managing body armour components passes to the receiving units, for issue to troops as their operational circumstances dictate, or for return to stock if no longer required.

The audit was undertaken by the DLO's Defence Clothing Integrated Project Team to better establish the current extent of holdings. It was extended to cover the procurement and issue of ECBA and some CBA components since 1992. The results of the audit are below in the Annex. This indicates that current stockholdings of ECBA components account for 66% of the total number procured since 1992. The remainder (some 38,000 plates, 29,000 fillers and 79,000 temperate/desert covers) have been consumed over this period of as a result of wear and tear, and operational loss. When the audit was carried out there were sufficient plates in stock—at central, single Service, and in-theatre storage facilities—to equip some 48,000 personnel (based on two plates per set of ECBA).

The data for the audit was collected from a number of sources. Whilst we hold central records of the procurement, issue and central stockholding of ECBA/CBA, information was also collated from the Services, Northern Ireland and Op TELIC to develop a more comprehensive picture of global holdings. Some of this data will have been collected against differing baselines and data on stockholdings can only therefore provide a snapshot in time.

It should also be noted that the figures for the number of issues include items that have been returned to stock and re-issued, possibly more than once, and therefore indicate the volume of activity rather than the number of items issued on a more permanent basis.

Taking into account the lessons learned from operations in Iraq, we are developing a policy for the future issue of ECBA, drawing on that which already exists for other items of personal protection such as the GS helmet and S10 respirator. The results of the ECBA audit will also inform this policy, in terms of the requirement for the initial procurement of ECBA components to support it. I will ensure that the PAC is informed as soon as final decisions are made.

Sir Kevin Tebbit KCB CMG
Permanent Under-Secretary of State

27 May 2004

DEFENCE CLOTHING INTEGRATED PROJECT TEAM AUDIT OF BODY ARMOUR
1992–2003

Table 1

ENHANCED COMBAT BODY ARMOUR

Item	Scaling	Procured	Issued	Stockholdings				NI	In-Theatre Op TELIC	Total Stock
				Central	Army	Navy	RAF			
Plates	2	134,546	160,866	40,315	8,649	1,771	2,292	18,860	24,536	96,423
Fillers	1	117,402	207,927	23,239	30,488	8,649	6,142	9,861	9,782	88,161
Covers:	1	10,499	49,697	46,255	683	432	127	—	22,065	69,562
Desert										
Temperate	1	69,980	96,510	9,614	5,141	1,087	1,015	10,054	5,037	31,948
Total Covers		180,479	146,207	55,869	5,824	1,519	1,142	10,054	27,102	101,510
Total ECBA Components		432,247	515,000	119,423	44,961	11,939	9,576	38,775	61,420	286,094

Notes:

1. There were also 12,146 UN Blue Covers issued, although this item has not been included in the audit.
2. The 515,000 issues detailed above, together with 176,458 issues of CBA temperate and desert covers gives a total issues figure of 691,458 (this excludes relatively small issues of other components detailed at Table 2 Note 4).

Table 2

COMBAT BODY ARMOUR (COVERS)

Item	Scaling	Procured	Issued	Stockholdings				NI	In-Theatre Op TELIC	Total Stock
				Central	Army	Navy	RAF			
Covers:										
Desert	1	—	44,176	30,233	—	139	—	—	2,610	32,982
Temperate	1	—	132,282	71,087	25,275	7,662	1,306	2,986	8	108,324
Total Covers		See Note 2	176,458	101,320	25,275	7,801	1,306	2,986	2,618	141,306

Notes:

1. The CBA figures are included for completeness, however, CBA Covers cannot be used with ECBA.
2. Quantities of CBA Covers procured was not sourced for this audit.
3. Fillers are listed as ECBA (Table 1) as they are common to both.
4. UN Blue (3,105 issued) and Royal Navy Covers (54 held by RN Units) have not been included in this audit. Also omitted were MOD Police Body Armour, Concealed High Velocity Body Armour, Searchers Body Armour and Improved Northern Ireland Body Armour. These are relatively small dependencies and would not materially affect the overall totals.