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Defence Committee

UK Operations in Iraq: Government Response to the Committee's Thirteenth Report of Session 2005–06

Twelfth Special Report of Session 2005–06

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The Defence Committee

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Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Defence Committee, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 5745; the Committee's email address is defcom@parliament.uk. Media inquiries should be addressed to Alex Paterson on 020 7219 1589.

UK Operations in Iraq

The Defence Committee published its Thirteenth Report of Session 2005–06 on UK Operations in Iraq on 10 August 2006, as House of Commons paper HC 1241. The Government's response to this report was received on 6 October 2006. This is appended below.

Appendix: Government response

1. The Government welcomes the Committee's report on UK Operations in Iraq. The Government's response to the conclusions and recommendations contained in the Committee's report is set out below.

We are disturbed by the deterioration in the security situation in MND(SE) over the past months. Coalition forces in the region now operate in the context of a significantly higher threat than they did during the initial post-conflict phase of operations. And for ordinary Iraqis, lawlessness remains a particular difficulty. We recognise that the security in South Eastern Iraq is very different from, and more benign than, in some areas beyond the UK's area of responsibility. We accept that the increase in violence in the region is due largely to the local struggle for political and economic power, rather than from a sectarian-based insurgency. But we remain concerned about the implications for UK Forces of the steady escalation of violence in the region. (Paragraph 15)

2. The security situation in Basra deteriorated in February and the levels of violence peaked in July and August. As the Committee accepts, much of the violence is attributable to armed militia vying for power and wealth. However the overall position is that the four Provinces of MND(SE) account for less than 4% of the total attacks in Iraq. The Al-Muthanna and Dhi Qar Provinces have satisfied the conditions required to transfer security to Iraqi control. In Maysan we have repositioned UK forces to allow us to address border security and reduce the threat of attacks on UK forces in the province by adopting a lower profile presence without fixed bases.

3. It is important to remember the role of British and coalition forces is to help hold the security ring while the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) develop and until the Government of Iraq and local authorities are able to take full charge of the country's security.

It is essential that the central Government in Baghdad, as a whole, maintains its interest in Basra and the wider region and has the capability to deliver its intentions. (Paragraph 16)

4. The Committee's conclusion reflects our on-going policy of engagement with the Government of Iraq to act in the interests of all Iraqis and, in particular, to support our efforts in Basra. Prime Minister Maliki visited Basra soon after taking office and the Iraqi Government has undertaken to deliver a security plan for Basra under the name OP SINBAD. This aims to implement measures that will improve the day-to-day lives of those living in the city and has already seen an increase in Iraqi Security Forces' presence on the streets. Alongside this, efforts will be made to deliver other benefits, such as clean drinking water, reliable electricity, and refuse collection, by providing local people with the know-how to deliver these services for themselves.

We were given differing assessments of the extent of the smuggling of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) across the border from Iran but we remain troubled about the implications of any such smuggling for the security of our forces and Iraqi civilians. Given the apparent ease with which IED technology can be smuggled across the border

with Iran, we were pleased to hear of plans to support and develop both the Iraqi Navy and the Border Forces to help contain this threat. (Paragraph 22)

5. The nature of some explosive devices being used, against British troops and elsewhere in Iraq, suggests the involvement of Iranian elements, including through Lebanese Hezbollah. We support the Government of Iraq's recent initiative to press Iran to cut its links with armed groups operating in Iraq, and to do more to improve border security and fight terrorism.

6. UK forces will continue their training and mentoring of the Iraqi Department of Border Enforcement (DBE). The recent re-posturing of UK forces in Maysan province has maximised our engagement with the DBE, while also providing a visible coalition presence on known smuggling routes.

7. The UK has played a lead role in developing both the Iraqi Navy and the Coast Guard and Inland Waterways Department. Our efforts focus upon encouraging Iraqi responsibility for maritime security, including deterrence and disruption of piracy, smuggling and terrorist activity. Iraqi forces are supported in this role by a significant coalition presence, and are increasingly operating in collaboration with their Kuwaiti partners.

Security sector reform will be crucial to the drawback, and the eventual withdrawal, of UK Forces from Iraq. UK and Coalition forces have achieved considerable successes in training the new Iraqi army. We hope that the Iraqi 10th Division will soon gain full operational readiness and progressively assume responsibility for the security of the region, with Multi-National Forces in a mentoring and supporting role. But we are concerned at the serious challenges that remain in training the Iraqi Police Service (IPS). Corruption, militia infiltration and politicization of the IPS should be addressed as a matter of priority. Sustainable progress for both the Iraqi Army and Police will only come about if problems in the Iraqi Defence and Interior Ministries are addressed. (Paragraph 27)

8. Intensive training of the Iraqi police continues (we expect 135,000 officers will have been trained by the end of 2006). The Coalition is assisting by providing professional skills training and infrastructure support in recruitment, vetting, internal affairs investigation and prosecution services. As a result, the Iraqi Police are discharging their basic duties in most provinces. Their performance is not, however, as effective as we would like and is not as developed as the Iraqi Army. There are concerns over the professionalism and loyalties of some elements of the Iraq Police and these remain serious challenges. We welcome, therefore, the announcement by Interior Minister Boulani of his intention to professionalise the service through training, including on human rights, and by taking measures against those who have acted illegally. This has been followed through—over 1000 corrupt officers were sacked from the Ministry of Interior and Iraqi Police Service in August.

9. In those MND(SE) provinces which have transferred to Provincial Iraqi Control, the Iraqi Police Service has been assessed as being capable of taking on the security role along with the other elements of the Iraqi Security Forces. This assessment of the Iraqi Security Force has been agreed at both provincial level and by the Ministerial Committee for

National Security, which includes the Iraqi Prime Minister. MND(SE)'s efforts to ensure that the Basra Iraqi Police Service reaches the standard required for Provincial Iraqi Control, has seen a marked Security Sector Reform surge into the city as part of Op SINBAD. A Government of Iraq cross-departmental team is preparing to visit all Provincial Directors of Police between August and October 06 with the purpose of removing "ghost" employees from the payroll, dismissing all those found to have criminal records and removing those with inappropriate associations with known militia.

10. The 10th Division of the Iraqi Army will be fully operational by December 2006 and the intention is to have transferred operational command to the Iraqi Ground Forces Command by this date. This will mark a significant step forward in the Iraqi Ministry of Defence taking responsibility for the command and control from the coalition.

11. HMG recognises the need for reform in both the Iraqi Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Interior. We have taken a leading role in the coalition's capacity building programmes within both Ministries. The Ministries are improving slowly, particularly in functional areas such as policy and plans, life support, inspectorate general and public relations/media etc. We pushed for the appointment of non-sectarian ministers to these Ministries and for regular meetings of the Iraqi Ministerial Committee on National Security—to exercise Iraqi political control over security issues, both of which have been achieved.

It is not clear how the four elements of the local transition assessment will be measured and what level of threat, or capability, will be required prior to transition. We call upon the MoD to clarify, in detail, the criteria for transition. (Paragraph 29)

12. There are four measures of assessment in deciding the readiness of the Iraqi civilian authorities to take on the responsibility for security. First, the level of threat, including that from militia. Second, the capability of the Iraqi security forces to deal with that threat. Third, the capacity of the national and provincial government. Fourth, the coalition's capacity to step in to support the Iraqi security forces if as needed.

13. Each of these assessments is underpinned by metrics, and recommendations made jointly by Provincial Governors and MNF-I representatives are passed finally to the Iraqi's Ministerial Committee for National Security, which includes the Iraqi Prime Minister, for final decision. In the case of the ISF there are detailed assessments of personnel, equipment, levels of training, leadership and support. The Transitional Readiness Assessment (TRA) process regularly grades each element across Iraq with the aim of each province achieving TRA Level 2—capable of conducting independent operations with some support from coalition forces.

14. The decision to transition a province is ultimately a political one based on the assessments and a balance of risks.

We welcome the recent hand-over of Muthanna province to Provincial Iraqi Control, as a first step in the transition process in MND(SE). The next 12 months will be critical in setting the conditions necessary for long-term Iraqi self-reliance. The key test in MND(SE) will be the transition of Basra, where significant problems remain. (Paragraph 31)

15. We recognise that there is progress to be made before Basra can handover to Provincial Iraqi Control and as a result we are taking the opportunity to promote stability in support of a series of immediate, short, medium and long term civil effects projects. The formation of Basra Security Committee and the Basra Security Plan shows the high priority that the Iraqi Government has given to Basra. We are working in partnership with the Iraqis to improve the conditions in Basra through a focused Iraqi-led security operation and associated immediate impact projects known as OP SINBAD.

16. Establishing the right conditions for a successful transfer of security responsibility depends largely on an Iraqi political solution that limits the ability of militia and other malign influences to affect the security environment.

Transition to Provincial Iraqi Control will allow UK Forces to draw back and assume a supporting role to Iraqi Security Forces. It does not mean that UK Forces will be able to withdraw from theatre, although we would expect some consequent reduction. We call upon the MoD to clarify the role which UK Forces will fulfil following transition and the implications for troop numbers in theatre. (Paragraph 32)

17. After the transfer of provinces to Iraqi provincial control, as is the case in Al-Muthanna and Dhi Qar, MND(SE) forces will re-posture and Iraqi forces will have the lead for day to day security on the ground with UK forces ready to deploy to assist should the Iraqi authorities request help. We will also continue to train and mentor the ISF. This will involve some centralisation of forces and the closure of some bases will free up troops and allow a more concentrated effect in support of the Iraqi security forces. The new posture will involve a more mobile Coalition profile to carry on monitoring the situation, mentoring the Iraqi authorities, supporting developmental activity and exceptionally by providing back up to local security forces when they ask for it. The intent is to provide a greater degree of support initially, and then reduce it over time.

18. The implication is a reduction in troop numbers but force levels are subject to regular conditions based assessments.

While we would expect the MoD to make reasonable efforts to recover equipment of high value, we support the pragmatic cost/value approach being taken, with equipment and bases passed on to the Iraqi Army where appropriate. (Paragraph 35)

19. The Government thanks the Committee for its recognition of the pragmatic approach.

We continue to be uncertain about the role of the PRT and believe that its value remains to be demonstrated. It is essential that the PRT should serve to enhance, rather than replace or duplicate, Iraqi decision making. (Paragraph 37)

20. The UK-led Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Basra is a multi-national, inter-agency operation which aims to build the capacity of Iraqi provincial government to govern itself. It is guided by the principle of strengthening and using Iraqi structures and processes wherever possible. Key PRT objectives are:

- To improve the delivery of UK and international civil and military assistance to southern Iraq by planning, co-ordinating and sequencing existing and planned interventions behind Iraqi strategies, priorities and processes;

- To develop the capacity of local government (including the Provincial Council and the Provincial Development and Reconstruction Committees) in southern Iraq, especially Basra Province;
- To strengthen the links between Iraqi Central and Provincial governance structures.
- To ensure that provincial structures can effectively disburse the increasingly large quantities of Iraqi money available to them from the Government of Iraq, in a manner consistent with their own development strategy.

21. So far the PRT has supported the Provincial Council in the development of the Provincial Development Strategy; helped align UK, US, Danish, MND(SE) and other international programming and plans; produced a Baseline Assessment of Basra against which progress can be measured; and is currently working to develop the Governance, Rule of Law, Economic and Reconstruction components of HMG's Better Basra Action Plan. This early groundwork has established a robust foundation for further sustainable development.

Iraq is potentially a wealthy country and we share the view that it should not be a priority for UK development funding, if this is at the expense of development support to poorer countries. Nevertheless, the Government should consider whether an injection of funding would help the Basra PRT deliver quickly. (Paragraph 38)

22. We believe that the PRT has sufficient financial resources to meet its objectives. The Committee may wish to note that since their visit, DFID has transferred administrative resources previously attached to their Governorate Capacity-Building Programme to the PRT. These include: six international experts; a flexible pool of technical assistance to respond to emerging priorities; and DFID's Governance Development Fund (currently £949,182 uncommitted).

23. On programme funding, the US has recently confirmed that they have increased their contribution to the Basra PRT from US\$15 million to US\$40 million. The UK is providing some £24 million in additional funding in support of projects as part of the Basra Security Plan.

We call upon the MoD to make public, on a regular basis, the number of detainees UK Forces hold in Iraq, how those figures have fluctuated since the opening of the Divisional Temporary Detention Facility at Shaibah, and the grounds for detention. Detention without trial is, of itself, undesirable, though we understand the reasons for it. (Paragraph 49)

24. The MOD notes that the Committee recognises the necessity of detention as authorised by UNSCR 1637. It has always been MOD policy to make available the number of individuals interned in the Divisional Temporary Detention Facility (DTDF). The MOD Press office is provided with a regular update of the numbers of internees currently held for briefing to journalists. All individuals in the DTDF are held for imperative reasons of security on the basis of the assessment of the Divisional Internment Review Committee, in line with UNSCR 1637.

We are pleased that the MoD is considering new ways of incorporating local Iraqi representatives in the review process for detainees held at the UK's Divisional Temporary Detention Facility. (Paragraph 49)

25. We are pleased the Committee supports our efforts to include Iraqi representation in our internee review procedures in Iraq. The first sitting of the joint UK-Iraqi Combined Review and Release Board took place in Baghdad on 11th September 2006. The Board will review the cases of internees held in the Divisional Temporary Detention Facility on a three monthly basis and the UK DIRC will continue to review on a monthly basis.

We call upon the MoD to explain what its plans are for the future of the DTDF after the closure of the Shaibah Logistics Base. (Paragraph 50)

26. Once we have removed all remaining useful materiel from Shaibah Logistics Base, our plan is to gift the remaining infrastructure to the Provincial Iraqi Authorities. It is our intention to retain a capability to use detention as part of our approach to security including through retaining our own dedicated facility, which will be located at Basra Air Station, as well as examining what scope there might be for joint facilities.

We are concerned at the increasingly sophisticated nature of the threat and the consequent vulnerability of UK Forces travelling in Snatch Land Rovers. We welcome the Secretary of State's review of the use of Snatch vehicles in Iraq and believe it is essential that this review be completed as quickly as possible. In the long-term, FRES may offer a solution to the difficulties associated with the Snatch, but its introduction is too far off to offer an answer to current operational needs in Iraq. The MoD should consider an "off the shelf" purchase as an immediate and interim replacement for Snatch, even if it does not fulfil the long-term capability requirement. It is unsatisfactory that the lack of capability was not addressed with greater urgency much earlier. (Paragraph 59)

27. The Secretary of State announced to Parliament on 24 July, before the HCDC report was published, the results of a review of our armoured vehicle fleet, against the background of the evolving operational situation in Afghanistan and Iraq. The review, in response to a changing threat, was completed in a matter of weeks and confirmed a requirement for a suite of vehicles to allow commanders increased flexibility. It recognised the requirement for new and improved protected vehicles with capabilities between our heavy armoured vehicles, such as Warrior and lighter patrol vehicles, such as Snatch Land Rovers.

28. As a consequence we are rapidly procuring around 100 Cougar vehicles from a United States company, Force Protection Inc. The Cougar will meet our requirement for a well protected, wheeled patrol vehicle but with a less intimidating profile than a tracked vehicle such as Warrior or FV430. Once fitted with Bowman radios and additional armour beyond the standard level of protection, which we believe will make them among the best in theatre but necessarily takes time they will be deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan under the name 'Mastiff'. We currently expect to deliver a capability by the end of the year.

29. We are also increasing our existing order for the VECTOR patrol vehicle. Before July 62 were on order which will now be supplemented by around 100 extra vehicles. VECTOR is planned to be delivered incrementally between January and August 2007, and we currently expect to have an effective capability in theatre by the end of January. VECTOR

is manufactured by Pinzgauer and offers increased mobility and capacity compared to Snatch Land Rovers as well as good protection, making it well suited for operational requirements in Afghanistan, particularly long-range patrols.

30. We also announced that an additional 70 FV430 tracked vehicles will be up-armoured and upgraded so that they will have a similar level of protection to the Warrior vehicle; again, this is on top of the 54 we have already ordered. This will relieve some of the pressure on the heavily committed Warrior as the FV430 can undertake similar tasks, but with a less intimidating profile. FV430 will also be delivered incrementally, with the first up-armoured vehicles expected to be in theatre in the autumn.

31. Together, these additional and accelerated options will now provide Commanders with increased flexibility to deal with the situations and threats they face. It is important to appreciate, however, that the Snatch Land Rover still has a role to play and these new vehicles will complement, not replace Snatch and Warrior. Maintaining a low patrol profile in Iraq and Afghanistan can be helpful, so where appropriate, a more mobile and less aggressive patrol vehicle such as Snatch, which enables us to engage with local people, could be the best vehicle to use. It is vital that our commanders have a choice, so that they can select a type of vehicle that will both meet the threat and achieve the desired force profile.

32. Even 'off the shelf' solutions take many months to deliver at the appropriate specification including the fitting of additional technical kit. The three programmes above have been addressed with significant urgency and will deliver in a timeframe which those who are familiar with the complexities of defence procurement will recognise as impressive.

We are concerned by the extreme temperatures to which our troops are subjected in armoured vehicles in Iraq. We call upon the MoD to investigate as a matter of urgency how the threat of heat exhaustion can be most effectively overcome, including examining the feasibility of equipping vehicles with air conditioning. UK troops have been operating in Iraq for over three years: it is unacceptable that resources have not yet been provided to combat the high temperatures. (Paragraph 62)

33. We are providing resources to combat high temperatures Of the Armoured vehicles currently serving in Iraq, air conditioning is already provided in SNATCH 1.5, SNATCH 2 and the desertised variant of the Battlefield Ambulance. An Urgent Operational Requirement was generated to install air conditioning in the driver's compartment – this was achieved by the end of 2005 and now all Warrior vehicles in Iraq have air conditioned driver's compartments.

34. A plan is in place to fit all Armoured Fighting Vehicles with Air Conditioning Units (ACUs) for deployment to Iraq on Op TELIC 10 (March 2007); this includes the FV430 series BULLDOG. In addition, the VECTOR and PANTHER vehicles are also being fitted with ACUs. Furthermore, air conditioning is a requirement that is being built into future vehicle specifications, including Mastiff.

We are also concerned that attention is given to the position of cooks and kitchen staff and that measures are taken to provide sufficient ventilation and to maintain properly adequate air-conditioning equipment. More broadly, we believe that our troops require

adequate air-conditioned environments not only while they are on duty but when they are at rest so that they can recover from the excessive heat. Effective recuperation is crucial to troops' alertness and hence to the avoidance of casualties. (Paragraph 63)

35. The Committee's recommendation that our troops require adequate air-conditioned environments when they are at rest is already recognised. Air conditioning is extensively used in accommodation, business offices, facilities such as welfare and catering, and medical facilities within any of the main camps.

36. It is important that air conditioning does not hinder acclimatisation which helps to prevent heat related illnesses.

37. Air conditioning is used in accommodation afforded to personnel within MND(SE), including leisure facilities. It is acknowledged that the areas where contracted chefs and kitchen staff work are obviously hotter than the others and work is ongoing to address this requirement.

We were impressed by the work of the Joint Helicopter Forces-Iraq (JHF-I) which fulfils an essential role in enabling UK operations on the ground. But we are deeply concerned at the shortage of helicopters in theatre and believe that unless measures are taken to increase the number of helicopters and to reduce pressure on crews, the effectiveness and coherence of UK operations on the ground will suffer. We call upon the MoD to examine what steps it can take to remedy the shortage of helicopters and implement them as a matter of urgency. (Paragraph 68)

38. There are sufficient numbers of helicopters in Iraq to carry out the allocated tasks though as with many areas of military capability, commanders will always desire more. These requirements are currently met from within our existing fleet of operational Battlefield Helicopters (BH). We acknowledge that against our planning assumptions for potential future operations we have less medium and heavy lift capability than we would ideally wish for, and that crews are operating outside planned Harmony guidelines. Such shortfalls do not, however, mean that we are unable to conduct our current and future operations successfully, which we do by careful management of our helicopter fleets and aircrews.

39. We expect the number of Lift helicopters to remain broadly constant over the next five years. However, work is under way now to improve the way support helicopters are used and maintained, particularly Chinook, Merlin and Sea King, with the aim of increasing their availability.

40. Flying hours are reviewed on a regular basis and are flexed in accordance with the operational requirements. For the longer term, the future size and shape of our support helicopter fleet is currently being studied in the Future Rotorcraft Capability programme.

41. This programme is looking at building our helicopter fleets for the future in both the land and maritime environments. It will involve a mixture of new buy aircraft and life extension for some in-service helicopters. The significant investment in more reliable and capable helicopters will help to address the shortfalls in Lift capability we have identified.

It is unacceptable that Servicemen and women, many of whom are serving greatly in excess of Harmony Guidelines, should have their leave disrupted by the MoD's inability to provide a reliable airbridge. (Paragraph 69)

42. We fully acknowledge the importance of periods of rest and recuperation from operations and make exhaustive efforts to provide a service which is as reliable as possible. Further information is provided below in response to points 19 and 22.

We call upon the MoD to address the issue of airbridge unreliability as a matter of priority. Although we recognise the improvements already made in this area, we believe additional steps must be taken to address the shortage of available aircraft. (Paragraph 71)

43. To help provide more platforms that can support the airbridge, we are increasing the number of aircraft we currently have with defensive measures so that they can operate in the highest threat environments. Specifically C-130J Hercules and Tristar aircraft are being fitted with further defensive measures; the work to fit C-130J airframes was completed in August with work ongoing as a priority on Tristar.

44. The passenger airbridge is provided by a combination of civil charter, primarily completing the long-distance leg, and RAF air transport aircraft flying into the operational theatre. The reliability of the airbridge depends on a range of factors including aircraft serviceability, availability of aircraft with necessary defensive measures, diplomatic clearances, and weather. Clearly some of these factors are outside the MOD's control. Nevertheless, we have contracts in place with commercial brokers for airlift charter that can be activated at very short notice when required in order to maintain a reliable service. These arrangements have proved to be highly effective during operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

We note that the safety of C-130 Hercules remains an issue of concern to aircrew in theatre. While we welcome the decision to fit Explosion Suppressant Foam (ESF) to some Hercules, we believe that it should be fitted to all Hercules in operational theatres. We are alarmed by the suggestion that the MoD might not be fitting protective systems because of the impact on other priorities. The protection of our Armed Forces should be given the highest priority. (Paragraph 74)

45. The protection of our Armed Forces is given the highest priority.

46. We are fitting ESF to the majority of our Hercules aircraft, those aircraft that operate in the highest threat environment. The work to fit ESF to our aircraft is being undertaken as quickly as possible commensurate with the need to maintain a capability to meet operational tasks. The first aircraft was modified last month (September 06).

47. All air transport aircraft, including the Hercules, that operate in Iraq and Afghanistan are fitted with appropriate defensive systems, although these vary between platforms. It is important to recognise that ESF may enhance an aircraft's survivability after it has been hit but it does not reduce the risk of an aircraft being hit in the first place; however, this risk is mitigated by tactics and, in the case of guided weapons, by other defensive systems.

We seek reassurance from the MoD that lessons will be learnt and safety features will be integrated in the plans for the A-400M. (Paragraph 75)

48. The MOD continuously reviews the mix of defensive measures that are required for our air transport fleet. We will ensure that A-400M will have the appropriate level of defensive measures to allow it to operate and meet current and future threats.

The MoD's confidence that the UK Armed Forces are not overstretched contrasts with what we are hearing from Service personnel on the ground. We are concerned that the "can-do" attitude of which our Services are rightly proud may be leading Service commanders to underplay the pressure on Service personnel and their families. The Armed Force can tolerate short-term pressure but sustained breaches of Harmony Guidelines will damage the Services' operational capability. This is a matter of crucial importance. We intend to take evidence on the MoD's Annual Report and Accounts in autumn and will give close attention to the data on Harmony Guidelines. (Paragraph 79)

49. Harmony Guidelines act as warning indicators to alert the planners to likely manning issues and potential areas of overstretch; and to the broad impact that operational plans will have on Service people. They are expressed in terms of unit harmony and individual harmony.

50. Unit Harmony Guidelines are based on elements that regularly deploy as formed units and are expressed as the number of months spent between tours (tour intervals) to allow sufficient time for unit recovery, recuperation and preparation for subsequent deployment. They are also used by the Department's planners to assess the manpower requirements necessary to undertake the full range of military tasks and to calculate the force structures required to meet the expected level of commitments.

51. Individual Harmony Guidelines apply to Service personnel and set the limits to how long they should be away from home within a specific period. Each Service operates different harmony guidelines – Royal Naval personnel should not exceed 660 days deployed in 36 months, the Army 415 days in 30 months and the Royal Air Force no greater than 2.5% of personnel to exceed 140 days detached in 12 months. Against these criteria 1% of the Royal Navy, 15% of the Army and 4% of the RAF currently exceed Individual Harmony Guidelines.

We are concerned that the MoD's reliance on reservists may not be sustainable: this is a matter we intend to return to when we examine the MoD's Annual Report and Accounts. (Paragraph 81)

52. Our reservists have an important part to play and contribute valuable sets of skills. Around 10% of our forces deployed since the mid-1990s have been from the Armed Forces Reserves. The Call Out of reservists is undertaken in accordance with the legal framework provided under the Reserve Forces Act 1996. That Act provides a number of legal safeguards for reservists including limitations on the duration of mobilised (permanent) service and a formal right for reservists and their employers to seek exemption from, or deferral of, Call Out. Regarding the duration of mobilised service, the maximum obligatory period of service permitted under the Act for reservists called out to support operations in

Iraq or elsewhere is 12 months in any three years. Reservists, may, however, volunteer to enter agreements to extend their period of mobilised service.

53. Legal safeguards are complemented by additional management safeguards which apply to the Call Out of reservists to ensure that the combined effect of the demands from operations in Iraq and elsewhere generally do not place an unacceptable burden on the reserve forces as a group. Currently, the management process to support enduring operations uses a policy of 'Intelligent Selection' that identifies those individuals who wish to be mobilised. The intention behind this approach is to aim only to mobilise individuals who are 'willing'. This pre-condition is only lifted in cases where the nature of operations has put pressure on numbers and the Services believe no valid reason exists for a nominated individual to avoid mobilised service. These cases are limited and are very carefully monitored and managed. Additionally, the Army has currently applied a generic 'supply-led' policy to restrict the provision of Territorial Army members to operations (Navy and RAF Reserves are currently provided under a 'demand-led' approach). This means that the sustainability of the Army Reserves' current output to operations is not in question.

There is clearly concern among UK personnel about the structure and level of allowances. It is not unreasonable that our Servicemen and women should expect some financial recognition for active service overseas: we intend to pursue this issue further. (Paragraph 82)

54. The British Armed Forces are a voluntary, expeditionary force and are remunerated as such. As a result, Service personnel are not currently paid additional monies specifically aimed at active service overseas. Our view has been that recompense is better provided by a package that supports their *whole service* with some financial enhancements while separated from family and friends, and by other means targeted at the needs of those on operations. This package is carefully constructed and reviewed on a regular basis.

Over recent years, the MoD has been quick to implement changes that produce savings but it does not appear to have addressed the growing number of capability gaps with the same or sufficient urgency. Long-term procurement projects are failing to deliver mission-critical capabilities on time. Capability gaps are opening up and these need to be met by the MoD as a matter of urgency, even if that means opting for interim solutions. We intend to return to this issue when we take evidence from the Chief of Defence Procurement in October. (Paragraph 87)

55. The MOD does not accept that capability gaps are not being addressed with urgency. There is a well-defined process, as noted in the Defence Industrial Strategy (DIS) at Chapter A2, for determining its priorities for equipment investment to deliver future military capability. In some cases, there can be a very short gestation period in devising a capability solution and bringing it into service quickly, perhaps via an upgrade or modification rather than a new piece of equipment or platform. For other, particularly larger, projects, given the scale of technical challenges involved, time is required to ensure a capability fulfils the identified requirement, is technically sufficiently mature and is a value for money solution. This is particularly the case for equipment that is likely to have a long service-life.

56. For capability requirements needed to support current operations there is a well-defined Urgent Operational Requirements (UOR) process. The Department has been praised by the National Audit Office (NAO) report “The Rapid Procurement of Capability to Support Operations”, published in November 2004, for its flexibility, speed and ingenuity in its approach to UORs. Over 98% of UORs procured for the warfighting phase of Operation TELIC were assessed as effective or highly effective by the troops in theatre. The use of UORs does not, however, imply shortcomings in the Equipment Programme. The Equipment Programme is designed to deliver the long-term core capabilities our forces need.

57. Nevertheless, the Department does accept that sometimes interim solutions can be the best option to fill capability gaps; the lease of four C-17 aircraft in 2000 (now purchased outright with a fifth) is an example of such a solution that met an air transport capability gap.

The Defence Industrial Strategy seeks to make a quantum difference to procurement on time and to cost. Given the tasks which our Armed Forces personnel now face, it is vital that it should succeed. However, the DIS will take some time to deliver the capabilities required (Paragraph 88)

58. We are pleased that the Committee recognises the importance of the Defence Industrial Strategy.

59. We have set an ambitious timetable to deliver real improvements in the way we achieve the delivery of capability to the armed forces. We have described the DIS implementation as a two year programme with 2006 the year for implementation of the changes described in the DIS and 2007 the year when we expect to see a real difference to our defence capability and strength of defence industry.

60. The Ministry of Defence believes it has suitable process in place to meet the long term needs of the armed forces and has demonstrated sufficient flexibility to address short term requirements generated by operational experience. For example well over £500m of Force Protection Urgent Operational Requirements have been approved for Iraq and Afghanistan in response to the specific conditions and changing threat in theatre. The urgent provision of around 270 additional vehicles represents considerable further investment.

The issues raised in this report give rise to a fundamental question: are our Armed Forces structures, trained and equipped to fulfil the role envisaged for them in the Strategic Defence Review and its successor policy documents? This is a question of very great importance, going to the heart of the Government’s defence policy. We believe this question needs to be addressed: we will return to it. (Paragraph 89)

61. The MOD continually reviews the strategic environment and how the Armed Forces are best placed to respond and shape it, including the development of the capabilities as envisaged by the Strategic Defence Review and successor policy documents.

62. We welcome the Committee’s intention to make a valuable contribution to the continuing debate about the structures of our Armed Forces.