



House of Commons  
Public Accounts Committee

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# Ministry of Defence: Support to High Intensity Operations

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Fifty-fourth Report of Session  
2008–09

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

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## The Public Accounts Committee

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### Committee staff

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## Summary

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The United Kingdom has deployed forces in Iraq since 2003 as part of the United States-led Multi-National Force-Iraq. On 30 April 2009, the Government announced the end of United Kingdom combat missions in Iraq and, as at May 2009, the number of United Kingdom forces had reduced to around 3,700 as part of the planned drawdown. United Kingdom Forces have been deployed to Afghanistan since 2002. The Ministry of Defence (the Department) currently has around 8,300 personnel there as part of a NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, predominantly in the Helmand province of Southern Afghanistan.

Both these theatres have presented considerable operational challenges for the Department in supporting United Kingdom forces. The combination of long distances between both Iraq and Afghanistan and the United Kingdom, as well as the lack of direct maritime access to Afghanistan, complicate the transporting of personnel and equipment. In addition, undertaking operations in these countries means coping with difficult environmental conditions, including harsh and varied terrain, extreme temperatures and dust. In Afghanistan, the pace and intensity of operations continues to be high against a significant and determined enemy threat. The support the Department provides to forces deployed on operations is crucial in enabling military capability.

The provision of medical support, including life-saving treatment at the front line, has been a particular success. This is reflected in the increasing number of unexpected survivors following severe battlefield injuries.

The provision of pre-deployment training is responsive to changing operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and theatre commanders are confident of its quality. But pre-deployment training is constrained by a number of factors, particularly the shortage of appropriate equipment to train with and delays in replicating Middle Eastern environments. The proportion of soldiers and Royal Marines who are not training with their units before deploying is increasing, passing risk on to theatre commanders.

The majority of equipment procured as Urgent Operational Requirements has performed well in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Some of these new vehicles, such as Mastiff, have provided improved protection. There have, however, been shortages of spare parts, including for Mastiff. Spare parts for the Merlin and Apache helicopters are also in short supply, and cannibalisation of helicopters to support the fleets deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan has contributed to an 11% shortfall in helicopters available for training and to support contingent operations.

The Department has not met its supply chain targets for the delivery of stock to Iraq and Afghanistan. Since July 2007 only 57% of demands made in Afghanistan and 71% made in Iraq met the supply chain targets. The Department has put in place measures to improve this performance, including action to increase the proportion of routine stocks that are delivered by surface transport. Despite progress, the Department's logistic information

remains inadequate.

On the basis of a report by the Comptroller and Auditor General,<sup>1</sup> the Committee examined the availability of equipment and spares, the re-supply of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan, the training of Service personnel for operations and support to Service personnel in theatre.

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1 C&AG's Report, *Ministry of Defence: Support to High Intensity Operations*, HC (2008–09) 508

## Conclusions and recommendations

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1. **The Department has been highly reliant on the Urgent Operational Requirements process to deliver new or enhanced capability for current operations, raising a question about the balance of its existing equipment programme.** The Urgent Operational Requirements process clearly has its place in enabling the Department to respond to rapidly evolving threats. Nonetheless, as part of the Government's forthcoming defence review, the Department should fundamentally re-examine whether the equipment programme is delivering the right balance between those capabilities relevant to current operations and those for the future.
2. **The Department has delivered important new equipment quickly through its Urgent Operational Requirements process in order to address evolving threats, but the consequence has sometimes been inadequate initial support or a time limited capability.** The Mastiff vehicle has performed well but suffered spares shortages, whereas the Vector vehicle proved to have low reliability and is now being replaced by an upgraded version of the Snatch vehicle it was intended to replace. There have also been shortages of equipment for pre deployment training. The Department should:
  - analyse a range of possible scenarios in which the equipment may be used beyond those initially envisaged, and model the resulting support and spares requirements;
  - prioritise the security of supply of spares, for example, by arranging for an alternative supplier from the outset where a manufacturer's capacity to deliver spares is constrained;
  - introduce a rigorous but streamlined process for the testing and evaluation of equipment before it is deployed in order to identify any reliability issues, and
  - consider procuring additional training solutions, such as simulators, where it judges that the initial delivery of new equipment needs to be prioritised for deployment rather than the training pool.
3. **The Department has failed to meet consistently its own supply chain targets for both Iraq and Afghanistan, although the average length of time a unit waits for a particular demand has reduced.** Inadequate logistic information prevents the Department from identifying stocks that could be routinely delivered to theatre using surface transport, in turn placing more pressure on the air-bridge. The Department's key priority is to improve the visibility it has of stocks in theatre and supplies in transit. Although progress has been made in the last few years, the Department still has not achieved a total visibility system for the tracking of assets deployed on operations. Nor does it yet have an integrated inventory management system. The Department should, within the next two years, address the deficiencies in its logistics information systems, so that it can see the stock available at any

location in theatre or elsewhere in the Department's inventory, and fully track items as they move through the supply chain.

4. **Helicopters are a key operational capability but in addition to its own fleets the Department has been reliant on significant contracted helicopter support and on coalition helicopters.** Commanders say they have enough helicopters to undertake their key tasks but that greater availability would give them more flexibility in planning offensive operations. The Department is looking to increase helicopter availability, for example, through the re-deployment of Merlin helicopters from Iraq. The Department needs to ensure that its Lynx upgrade programme, due to deliver the first enhanced helicopter at the end of the year, delivers aircraft to theatre in time to free up other helicopter types to support troops directly over the summer months. The Department should also ensure that the Chinook Mark 3 reversion programme, due for completion by May 2010, is delivered on time.
5. **Key spares for Merlin and Apache helicopters are in short supply, necessitating cannibalisation of aircraft and reducing helicopter availability in the United Kingdom.** The Department rightly prioritises operations within its objective of seeking a sustainable balance between operational and training requirements. The Department should, however, seek ways to further incentivise industry to achieve better availability of spares in order to provide support to helicopters both in the United Kingdom and deployed overseas.
6. **The effectiveness of body armour provided to the soldiers has improved since the invasion of Iraq in 2003, but this and other equipment, such as electronic countermeasures, are a considerable weight for soldiers to carry whilst on foot patrol, making it challenging to move quickly and freely while under fire.** The Department is making progress with the introduction of lighter Osprey body armour and has plans to develop lighter batteries. The Department now needs to turn its attention to reducing the weight of more complex equipment, including electronic counter-measures, over the next two years.
7. **The proportion of personnel deploying to theatres who have completed short packages of individual reinforcement training, rather than full collective pre deployment training, has increased.** The Department should either reverse the trend so that a higher proportion of personnel deploying receive collective training, or consider a redesign of its individual reinforcement training, based on a full analysis of the risks being transferred to theatre commanders.
8. **In order to focus on the particular skill sets required for current operations, the Royal Air Force have minimised the numbers of personnel trained in certain skills which may be required for future operations.** The Department should, more systematically, examine the effect of this 'hibernation' on the generic warfighting capability across the three Services and the risk of not being able to regenerate such capabilities after two, five and 10 years of hibernation.

9. **The Department has made progress in developing a process to identify, on operations, personnel at risk of developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or other mental illnesses.** The Department should continue with this work and mandate Trauma Risk Incident Management across the three Services.
10. **Operational circumstances mean that there is a difference between the welfare provision available at Main Operating Bases and that available at Forward Operating Bases.** Whilst it is not practical to deliver the entire welfare package to personnel at the more austere Forward Operating Bases, delays in providing equipment should not result from delays in seeking funding approval. The Department should make every effort to deliver promptly those elements of the welfare package which can be made available at forward bases, such as satellite telephones.
11. **The Contingency Operating Base at Basra airport came under sustained mortar and rocket attack from May 2006. The Department decided in June 2007 that hardened accommodation was required, but the second tranche of this accommodation had not been brought into use by the time United Kingdom Forces withdrew in 2009.** The Department should examine the contingency plans for Camp Bastion in Afghanistan and established call-off contracts so that it can more quickly begin construction of hardened accommodation should a similar escalation in the threat to personnel arise.



# 1 Availability of equipment and spares

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1. To support potential operations overseas the Ministry of Defence (the Department) procures equipment through its Equipment Programme which is resourced from the Department's own budget. Specific operations such as Iraq and Afghanistan are a challenge to the Department's existing equipment both because of the environmental conditions, such as temperature extremes, altitude and terrain, and because of the rapid evolution of the threat from changing enemy tactics. To respond to these challenges, the Department has had to upgrade existing equipment and introduce new equipment through its Urgent Operational Requirements process. Equipment funded through this process is in most cases resourced by the Treasury.

2. The Department's existing equipment has in some areas been deployed effectively and has provided the required operational capability, despite needing significant upgrade work. The majority of the Department's new equipment, however, has been procured through the Urgent Operational Requirements process. This is because much of the Department's existing equipment was not designed to face the environmental challenges or the evolving threat of current operations.<sup>2</sup> As at March 2009, the Department has approved £4.2 billion for Urgent Operational Requirements, including modifications to helicopters and aircraft, new vehicles and better protection for existing vehicles, early attack warning systems for bases and electronic counter-measures.<sup>3</sup>

3. The Department has introduced new vehicles such as Mastiff and Jackal, and confidence in their performance and levels of protection is high.<sup>4</sup> There have, however, been shortfalls in the provisioning of spare parts for some equipment types. Provisioning for the Mastiff vehicle was based on the assumption that it would be used on roads and not off-road, as has happened in Afghanistan. In Iraq and Afghanistan, the deployed fleet of 87 Mastiff vehicles consumed 176 axles between December 2006 and January 2008, causing availability to drop to on average 23% below the Department's target.<sup>5</sup> Only around 20% of the Mastiff fleet was classified as 'fit' in June 2008, with a further 55% able to undertake a limited role. The Department had initially procured some additional spares over and above the predicted level of consumption to ensure a degree of flexibility in Afghanistan.<sup>6</sup> However, it significantly underestimated the degree to which spares were required as a result of the vehicle's reliability and enemy action. In addition, the supply of spare parts from the United States manufacturer caused further delays.<sup>7</sup> The Department has subsequently resolved the problem of spares shortages and the availability of Mastiff vehicles has improved.<sup>8</sup>

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2 Q 3

3 C&AG's Report, para 1.6

4 C&AG's Report, para 1.9

5 C&AG's Report, Box 3

6 Q 5

7 Q 5

8 Q 45

4. The nature of the Urgent Operational Requirements process minimises all the phases of standard procurement in order to deliver capability quickly to the Armed Forces deployed on operations. If an equipment is urgently required in theatre, the Department has to balance the decision to deploy it as quickly as possible and derive benefit from it (but with the risk of problems of spares and limited availability for training purposes), or instead hold it back to produce a complete support solution and suffer the operational risk that this delay may cause.<sup>9</sup> Test and evaluation phases for these vehicles and equipment are, therefore, limited, and as a consequence reliability problems have in some cases not been revealed until they were deployed on operations.<sup>10</sup> The Vector vehicle, procured to replace the Snatch Land Rover, has not been one of the successes of the compressed procurement process, and is now being replaced by an upgraded version of the same Snatch Land Rover. Used in both Iraq and Afghanistan, Vector has suffered from poor reliability and low levels of spares, resulting in an average availability of below 60% in 2008. But the fact that it was procured as an Urgent Operational Requirement meant that the Department only became aware of these problems once the vehicle had been deployed.<sup>11</sup>

5. There are shortages of spare parts for both Merlin and Apache helicopters. The initial procurements of spares are still being delivered from industry and as a consequence there are some key components in short supply. Despite these problems, many helicopter types are flying more hours than expected in Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

6. In Afghanistan, commanders on the ground are content with the number of helicopters available to them to undertake their key tasks but say that greater availability would give them more flexibility in planning offensive operations. The Department is, however, reliant on access to contracted civilian support helicopters, providing around 600 flying hours a month, as well as helicopter contributions from NATO and other coalition countries.<sup>13</sup> The Department is looking to increase helicopter availability, for example, through redeploying Merlin helicopters from Iraq. In December 2008, the Department announced an upgrade to the Lynx helicopter to enable it to overcome the hot summer conditions in which it struggles. The first upgraded helicopter will be available in late 2009.<sup>14</sup> This upgrade will enable Lynx to provide more hours performing a range of tasks such as escorting support helicopters, thereby freeing up Apache to support ground troops.<sup>15</sup>

7. In 2008, the Committee considered the Department's procurement of the eight Chinook Mark 3 helicopters.<sup>16</sup> In responding to the Committee, the Department considered that reversion of these aircraft to a support helicopter role remained the fastest strategy to deliver additional Chinooks to meet operational requirements. The Department was

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9 Q 8

10 C&AG's Report, para 1.7

11 Q 44

12 Q 46

13 Q 10

14 Q 9

15 C&AG's Report, para 1.8

16 Committee of Public Accounts, Eighth Report of 2008–09, *Ministry of Defence: Chinook Mk 3 Helicopters*, HC 247

planning, subject to operational requirements, to increase the Chinook fleet in Afghanistan in 2010.<sup>17</sup>

8. Spares shortages have led to short-term cannibalisation of helicopters both in theatre and in the United Kingdom. This has resulted in lower than expected availability of helicopters in the United Kingdom as spares have been prioritised for operations.<sup>18</sup>

9. The effectiveness of body armour provided to soldiers today has improved since the combat phase of operations in Iraq in 2003. This enhanced protection, along with personal equipment, weapons, communications equipment and an increasing quantity of electronic counter-measure equipment, has considerably increased the weight carried by the soldier. In total, a soldier on foot patrol may be carrying between 50kg and 90kg.<sup>19</sup> The weight carried makes it challenging to move quickly and freely, particularly while under fire. The Department is making progress in reducing the weight of personal equipment with the introduction of lighter Osprey body armour and lighter batteries.<sup>20</sup>

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17 Treasury Minute (Cm 7622), on the Committee of Public Accounts, Eighth Report of 2008–09, *Ministry of Defence: Chinook Mk 3 Helicopters*, HC 247

18 Q 85; C&AG's Report, para 1.16

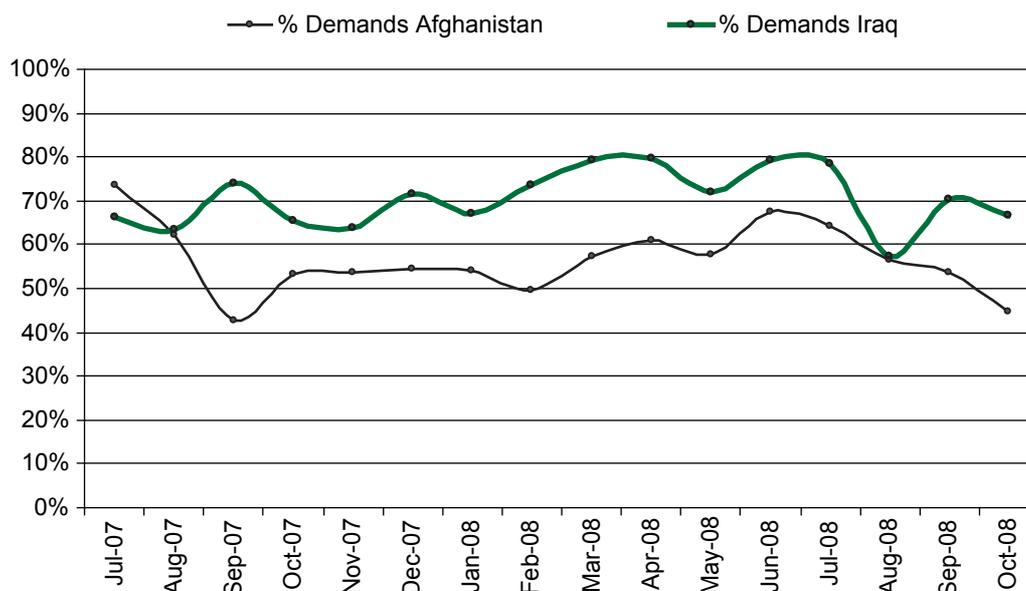
19 C&AG's Report, para 4.24

20 Qq 100, 103, 110

## 2 Re-supplying troops in Iraq and Afghanistan

10. Despite the challenging operational environments, the Department has successfully delivered around 300,000 personnel and 90,000 tonnes of freight to the two theatres over the last two years using a combination of air and sea lift.<sup>21</sup> On average since July 2007, only 57% of all demands made in Afghanistan and 71% made in Iraq have met the supply chain targets (**Figure 1**). The Department's performance against these targets has varied monthly and is lower for Priority 01 (highest priority) demands than for Priority 02. The average length of time a unit waits for a particular demand has, however, reduced by around 43% in Afghanistan and 25% in Iraq, suggesting that the supply chain is becoming more stable and resilient.<sup>22</sup> Measures being taken to improve the effectiveness of supply include reviewing stock held in different locations in Afghanistan<sup>23</sup> and action to increase the proportion of materiel tracked while in transit.<sup>24</sup>

**Figure 1: The percentage of demands meeting the Department's supply chain targets**



Source: C&AG's Report, Figure 18

11. We first investigated the Department's logistic information systems in 1984<sup>25</sup> and have examined them subsequently, including after Operation GRANBY in 1993<sup>26</sup> and

21 C&AG's Report, para 2.13

22 Q 1

23 C&AG's Report, para 2.10

24 Q 1

25 Committee of Public Accounts, Thirty-third Report of 1983–84, *Ministry of Defence: Economy of Stores Support*, HC 411

26 Committee of Public Accounts, Twenty-sixth Report of Session 1993–94, *Ministry of Defence Movements of Personnel, Equipment and Stores to and from the Gulf*, HC 393

Operation TELIC in 2003.<sup>27</sup> Since 2003 some progress has been made, including the introduction of the ‘Total Asset Visibility (minus)’ system.<sup>28</sup> The Department still does not have in-theatre asset-tracking or inventory management systems to enable it to maintain proper track of all equipment and assets whilst the Armed Forces are deployed overseas. This means that they still rely on manual systems to back up the limited logistic information systems that exist. The limitations of the information available prevent the Department from identifying stocks that could be routinely ordered and delivered to theatre using surface transport, which could in turn reduce pressure on the air-bridge.<sup>29</sup>

12. The Department’s transport for passengers to Iraq, centred on a commercial charter to Qatar, provides a good level of service. Since February 2006, however, an average of 12.5% of passenger flights to Afghanistan and 16.9% of flights returning to the United Kingdom using the Department’s own fleets have been subject to a delay of six hours or more.<sup>30</sup> Whilst these delays can be attributed to many factors, ranging from enemy action to weather, aircraft reliability has been a major contributory cause. Since 2006, on average, 45.5% of the seven passenger-carrying variants of the Tristar aircraft have been unavailable to support operations.<sup>31</sup> The Department has taken steps to improve the aircraft’s availability through improved support contracts and better logistic support.<sup>32</sup>

13. In Afghanistan the supply of key stocks has at times been a cause for concern. In July 2008 at Camp Bastion, fuel stocks were approximately 5% against a mandated target of 80%. Consumption of fuel had outstripped demand and the rate of consumption was at times 100% higher than that provisioned for. The Department was forced to enact contingency plans to maintain supplies. These plans involved looking for additional local suppliers of fuel to supplement that provided through the existing NATO contractor. Also in July 2008 the levels of bottled water at Camp Bastion fell to just 10% of the mandated target. The water bottling plant at Camp Bastion is now producing sufficient bottles per day to reduce deliveries to the camp and also provide a contingency stock. Actual usage rates for fuel and water are now closely monitored against the predicted demand profiles to ensure that stock levels do not fall to critically low levels again.<sup>33</sup>

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27 Committee of Public Accounts, Thirty-ninth Report of Session 2003-04, *Ministry of Defence: Operation TELIC—United Kingdom military operations in Iraq*, HC 273

28 C&AG’s Report, para 2.9, Box 7

29 C&AG’s Report, para 2.33

30 C&AG’s Report, para 2.16

31 C&AG’s Report, para 2.17

32 Q 22

33 C&AG’s Report, para 2.20

### 3 Training Service personnel for operations

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14. The pre-deployment training for Iraq and Afghanistan has been responsive to lessons identified in theatre and commanders are confident in its overall quality.<sup>34</sup> Pre-deployment training builds on general warfighting training known as the adaptive foundation to prepare individuals for deployment on operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Between 2006 and 2008, 59,000 people were trained by the Operational Training Advisory Group for operations in Iraq and almost 58,000 for Afghanistan.<sup>35</sup> The Department is now adjusting its training programmes so that some of the material which was previously covered in pre-deployment training will in future be dealt with in the general war-fighting training phase. The Army is changing its practice so that mission-specific training now generally occurs over a 15-month rather than a six-month period.<sup>36</sup>

15. The equipment used for pre-deployment training does not include many of the Urgent Operational Requirement upgrades and was not of the same standard as that used in theatre ('theatre entry standard'). There have been equipment shortages in many areas and some key equipments were missing altogether. Many troops have not had direct experience of some equipment, such as electronic counter-measures systems, before arriving in theatre.<sup>37</sup> The Department has introduced a new Operational Training Equipment Pool which has provided trainers with new vehicles and equipments not previously available, but numbers remain limited to support the scale of pre-deployment training. The Department has recently increased the numbers of Mastiff and Jackal vehicles available.<sup>38</sup>

16. An increasing proportion of individuals are not deploying with their units. Currently 48% of soldiers and Royal Marines are only completing short individual reinforcement training packages, rather than more extensive pre-deployment training. The current individual reinforcement package for the Army and Royal Marines is only five days long, although the Department intends that few personnel will in future be deployed with only five days' training.<sup>39</sup> Unlike the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, the Operational Training Advisory Group provide a single package of individual reinforcement training, regardless of whether personnel are required to go 'outside the wire' or remain on main operating bases—'inside the wire'.<sup>40</sup> These issues pass additional risk on to commanders in theatre, although they are in part mitigated by the Reception Staging and Onward Integration (RSOI) training packages which are carried out in theatre.

17. The majority of pre-deployment training is completed in the unit's home location with the aim of reducing the amount of time spent away from home. Mission Rehearsal Exercises are completed on Salisbury Plain (United Kingdom) and Sennelager (Germany)

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34 C&AG's Report, para 3.7

35 C&AG's Report, para 3.6

36 Q 25

37 C&AG's Report, para 3.11

38 Q 25; C&AG's Report, para 3.13

39 Qq 91–92

40 C&AG's Report, para 3.15

which do not replicate the climate and environment in either Iraq or Afghanistan.<sup>41</sup> Live firing ranges available for training have been used intensively and pressure on their usage has made it difficult for some units to achieve high standards. The Department has enhanced the training facilities in Norfolk at a cost of £18 million. These facilities consist of suitable rural and urban villages to better represent the environments that troops are currently operating in. The construction of the enhanced 'rural' village was completed in April 2009.<sup>42</sup>

18. Current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are having a significant impact on other training and exercises designed to prepare forces for high intensity warfare ('the adaptive foundation'). It is becoming increasingly difficult for brigades under the command of Headquarters Land Forces to achieve the collective training targets set out in the adaptive foundation prior to the commencement of pre-deployment training. The Royal Air Force has had to 'hibernate' certain skills by minimising the number of personnel trained for specific tasks, such as Harrier fighter pilots who are no longer training to land at night on aircraft carriers.<sup>43</sup> The result of this is that the Department is carrying elements of risk in its ability to conduct contingent operations.<sup>44</sup> The Department appears to have no overall process for managing the effects of hibernation or making judgements about which capabilities they choose to hibernate.<sup>45</sup>

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41 C&AG's Report, para 3.19

42 C&AG's Report, para 3.20

43 C&AG's Report, para 3.23

44 C&AG's Report, para 3.22

45 Q 89

## 4 Support to Service personnel in theatre

19. The Department's success in delivering life-saving medical treatment is underlined by the number of 'unexpected survivors' following the most severe of injuries.<sup>46</sup> There is, however, a long-standing shortage of regular Armed Forces medical manpower and specific shortfalls have occurred in 'pinch point' professions (**Figure 2**).<sup>47</sup> For the most part shortfalls are filled by Reservists and contracted staff, but the Department would now be unable to deploy the required medical support without their contribution.<sup>48</sup> In addition, shortfalls have also meant that some Regular medical personnel have deployed more frequently than planned. For example, 19% of Medical Officers in the Royal Air Force breached the Department's Harmony guidelines on the amount of time personnel spent away from home between November 2006 and September 2008.<sup>49</sup>

**Figure 2: Shortfalls in key medical personnel at September 2008**

ROLE	ANNUAL OPERATIONAL REQUIREMENT	DEPLOYABLE REGULARS
Anaesthetist	108	45
General Surgeon	54	22
Emergency Medicine	27	16
Neurosurgeon	9	0
Emergency Medicine Nurse	96	74
Intensive Care Nurse	92	47
Infection Control Nurse	5	4
Pharmacist	12	8

Source: Ministry of Defence

20. The Department has made progress in developing a process to identify, on operations, personnel at risk of developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder or other mental illnesses. This involves the use of decompression leave at the end of operational tours, including for those deploying as individuals, and the rolling out of Trauma Risk Incident Management to recognise personnel who may be suffering stress.<sup>50</sup>

21. The number of attacks on Basra Air Station increased steadily from May 2006. Despite this, it took until June 2007 for the Department to submit a business case for the construction of improved Tier 3 structures. The Department subsequently began construction of four Tier 3 structures at Basra Airport providing hardened kitchen, dining

46 C&AG's Report, para 4.6

47 Q 29

48 Q 30

49 C&AG's Report, para 4.12

50 Q 94

and communal welfare facilities, known as tranche 1. A further four Tier 3 structures, known as tranche 2, would provide a hospital and three accommodation units. During 2008, the security situation in Iraq improved considerably. The Department began planning for the eventual drawdown of troops and as a result scaled back the work on the tranche 2 facilities, opting to finish the construction of the four structures but leave them as empty shells.<sup>51</sup> The Department has spent around £100 million on these eight structures. During May 2009, the Department informed Parliament that these structures and assets associated with them were to be gifted to United States Forces, at a nominal value, since they sit on Iraqi soil and cannot be sold on the open market.<sup>52</sup>

22. In general, the Department is delivering its Deployed Welfare Package successfully, providing access to leisure, communications and laundry facilities.<sup>53</sup> There are, however, some problems associated with the levels of provision at both main and forward operating bases. Planning ratios are used to provide elements of the Deployed Welfare Package. For example, telephones are provided on a planning ratio or 'scaling' of one telephone per 40 personnel for static locations. These ratios are based on the number of UK Forces and contractors, and do not take into account other coalition nations for whom the Department provides food and welfare facilities under formal agreements, nor the periods where brigades change over and numbers on the main bases double. At times facilities have come under significant pressure, making them hard to access.<sup>54</sup>

23. Operational circumstances mean that there is a difference between the welfare provision available at Main Operating Bases and that available at Forward Operating Bases. Whilst it is not practical to deliver the entire welfare package to personnel at Forward Operating Bases, those elements of the package, such as satellite phones, that can be made available, should be prioritised. The Department has been slow in delivering these phones, primarily as a result of delays in making funding available.<sup>55</sup>

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51 Q 38; C&AG's Report, Box 18

52 Ev 19

53 Q 106

54 C&AG's Report, para 4.21

55 Qq 48-50

# Formal Minutes

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**Wednesday 15 July 2009**

Members present:

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Keith Hill

Mr Don Touhig

Mr Austin Mitchell

Draft Report (*Ministry of Defence: Support for High Intensity Operations*), proposed by the Chairman, brought up and read.

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

Paragraphs 1 to 23 read and agreed to.

Conclusions and recommendations read and agreed to.

Summary read and agreed to.

*Resolved*, That the Report be the Fifty-fourth Report of the Committee to the House.

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

*Ordered*, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

[Adjourned till Wednesday 14 October at 3.30 pm

## Witnesses

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**Wednesday 8 July 2009**

*Page*

**Sir Bill Jeffrey KCB**, Permanent Under Secretary, **Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach KCB, CBE**, Chief of Joint Operations at Permanent Joint Headquarters and **Lieutenant General Dick Applegate OBE**, Chief of Materiel (Land), DE&S, Ministry of Defence

Ev 1

## List of written evidence

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- 1 John Hutton, Secretary of State for Defence
- 2 Ministry of Defence

Ev 18

Ev 19

## List of Reports from the Committee of Public Accounts 2008–09

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First Report	Defence Information Infrastructure	HC 100
Second Report	The National Programme for IT in the NHS: Progress since 2006	HC 153
Third Report	Skills for Life: Progress in Improving Adult Literacy and Numeracy	HC 154
Fourth Report	Widening participation in higher education	HC 226
Fifth Report	Programmes to reduce household energy consumption	HC 228
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# Oral evidence

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## Taken before the Committee of Public Accounts on Wednesday 8 July 2009

Members present

Mr Edward Leigh, in the Chair

Mr Paul Burstow  
Mr David Curry  
Nigel Griffiths  
Mr Austin Mitchell

Dr John Pugh  
Geraldine Smith  
Mr Don Touhig  
Mr Alan Williams

**Mr Amyas Morse**, Comptroller & Auditor General, National Audit Office, was in attendance.

**Mr Marius Gallaher**, Alternative Treasury Officer of Accounts, was in attendance.

### REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL SUPPORT TO HIGH INTENSITY OPERATIONS (HC 508)

*Witnesses:* **Sir Bill Jeffrey**, KCB, Permanent Under Secretary, **Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach**, KCB, CBE, Chief of Joint Operations at Permanent Joint Headquarters and **Lieutenant General Dick Applegate**, OBE, Chief of Materiel (Land), DE&S, Ministry of Defence, gave evidence.

**Q1 Chairman:** Good afternoon and welcome to the Committee of Public Accounts where today our hearing is on the Comptroller and Auditor General's Report on *Support to High Intensity Operations*. We welcome Sir Bill Jeffrey back to our Committee, who is the Permanent Under Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, Lieutenant General Dick Applegate, who is the Chief of Materiel (Land) and Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach, who is Chief of Joint Operations. You are all very welcome. From reading this Report it is obvious it presents a mixed picture. In some areas, Sir Bill, you seem to have done quite well, for instance, medical support, where you have achieved significant success and that is mentioned in the Report, but in others, such as logistics supply or pre-deployment training, there are obviously still problems to address. So, by way of opening this hearing, could I ask you to tell us how you are going to maintain improvement in these difficult areas such as logistics supply where you have had problems? We all appreciate we are dealing with very difficult environments in Afghanistan and Iraq, and of course we start our hearing by paying tribute to our troops who are doing such magnificent work there.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** Thank you, Chairman. Can I start by saying that this issue is right at the top of our agenda. Our Defence Board two or three years ago decided—and the Chief of Defence Staff and I were completely agreed on this—that we should give a signal to the Department that support for current operations was the Department's highest priority. Although this is not a picture which is in every respect as we would wish, we feel we have made quite a lot of progress. I can assure the Committee that within the Department everyone who deals with support for current operations is keenly aware of how much hangs on it, not just in terms of operational success but in terms of the protection of our people. I add my own words of sympathy to

those you have expressed on the recent casualties. In terms of building on this, I think you are right to say that logistics and the supply chain is one of the areas where we have found most difficulty. It partly reflects the fact that this is not getting supplies to Sainsbury's or Tesco but involves an enormously extended supply chain in some very inhospitable territory. I think we have made progress, as the Report brings out, and one figure which leaps out of my brief is that between September 2007 and September 2008 the average length of time that a unit waited for materiel through the supply chain reduced by 43% in Afghanistan, 68% for the highest priority items, and 25% in Iraq. How we can make more progress, building on the NAO's recommendations, I would say is principally by getting better visibility both of our stocks in theatre and in the UK, and of the materiel in transit. The main systems that we have been working on and introducing, and will continue to introduce, are about tracking materiel in transit even more effectively than we do at the moment.

**Q2 Chairman:** You have spent £4.2 billion over the last six years on equipment procured under Urgent Operational Requirements. The obvious question, Sir Bill, is why has not your routine equipment programme delivered any of this capability you have had to deliver under Urgent Operational Requirements? Are you not trying to do too much under UORs?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** The first point to make is that a good deal of our existing equipment has been used in theatre, but it is undoubtedly the case that the experience of operating in the real environment, in combat and against an enemy whose own tactics have evolved over time, has generated requirements which were not there before. If you look in particular at the reasons why existing equipment may not meet

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our needs, they are many and various. Sometimes our existing equipment turns out in the particular operation we are involved in simply not to be required. Sometimes it is too imposing, when operating closely among a civilian population. Sometimes, as the NAO's Report brings out, the threat changes and what is necessary to protect our people evolves over time. That is the history—

**Q3 Chairman:** Or another reason, Sir Bill, let us be honest about it, is that your equipment programme is basically unaffordable. You tick your big ticket items, which we are not necessarily dealing with today, so you cannot devote sufficient priority to these urgent requirements in Iraq and Afghanistan. Because your main procurement programme is unaffordable, you are having to load more and more things which you urgently need in Iraq and Afghanistan on something which is not designed to take the strain?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I would argue, Chairman, that they are two separate issues. It is undoubtedly the case that in recent years we have had to face cost pressures within the equipment programme and we had an examination of it last year which involved taking quite substantial costs out of the forward programme. The Defence Review which the Secretary of State for Defence announced yesterday, and committed the present Government to yesterday, will certainly be an opportunity to look radically at the existing inherited programme. The point you started with I would argue is a distinct question, which is whether—and it is a very fair point—the inherited product of previous equipment programmes ought to be more attuned to the actual engagements we get into. There I would say that some of what we inherited from the past we have deployed, and deployed very effectively, but particularly working in these conditions of temperature, of altitude in some cases, against this sort of enemy, we have undoubtedly discovered as time has past we have had to look to the Treasury for funding for additional or alternative forms of equipment.

**Q4 Chairman:** I will come back to that in a moment. General Applegate, we have obviously had a number of tragedies in Afghanistan, even in the last two weeks, and we have the escalation of threat with roadside bombs and mines. What is this telling you about the vehicles our troops need? What vehicle would your soldiers rather be in in Afghanistan?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** I was in theatre two weeks ago to ask exactly that question, because I go routinely to theatre to make sure I am in contact with the thoughts of the people on operations. What I get from the commanders is they want a variety of vehicles. The Mastiff, which doubtless we will come back to, is hugely effective but it is not very good across country and it is certainly not the ideal vehicle for moving through the Green Zone. The vehicle itself can be constrained and is therefore more predictable. For example, there has been a lot of press coverage recently about the Viking. I can tell you the Viking at the moment is fundamental to the

operation which is on-going. At the moment, as far as I am concerned—I go to theatre and check—they tell me they want a range of vehicles, vehicles which can be used in open ground, vehicles which can be used in close terrain, vehicles which can be used in urban areas. I am afraid at the moment we have not found, nor has anybody else, a vehicle which can do all of those things.

**Q5 Chairman:** They might say, might they not, or this is what I am being briefed by the National Audit Office, that they would prefer perhaps to be in a Mastiff, but if you look at Box 3 on page 13 you can see that there are shortages of spares and they are detailed in that box. This is relating what is happening on the ground to this problem of the UOR process, is it not? Often these vehicles start off with what they need but the process is not sufficiently robust to ensure that our troops on the ground have the spares they need for the Mastiff they want to be in. Is that a fair criticism?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I do not think it is actually. If you look at the box, there are two sets of graphs. On the use of the Mastiff in Iraq, you will notice the availability was high because that is how it would be predicted it would be used, and that was what we based our spares judgments on from the US Marine Corps, who were the experts. We did actually put in some more spares to ensure we had a degree of flexibility for Afghanistan which, of course, was less predictable and was not where the vehicle was being used. So we made a judgment call, and we make a judgment call every day, that it was more appropriate to field a vehicle, recognising there may be early risks with spares, but that we would recover that position over time. Some of the problems relate to shortage of spares, and the priority given to the US, but others relate to the amount of enemy action, and some of those problems relate to the fact there are a large number of IED attacks.

**Q6 Chairman:** What do you say to the fact in the Report it says that on occasion the demand outstrips the ability to supply systems to deliver?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** That is correct. We are in a very dynamic environment. The threat changes. We are fielding many types of vehicle. As I say, on a traditional equipment programme we would of course move at a much slower pace, we would make sure there was a fully equipped spares pack, but we make judgments, not just on vehicles but, for example, on fielding the Apache, that we would save more lives by deploying—

**Q7 Chairman:** It is not just shortage of spares, is it? This is again part of this whole UOR process, it is shortage of equipment to train on—this is dealt with in paragraph 3.13—and the failings which allow the Vector vehicle to be deployed when it was not fit-for-purpose—that is mentioned in 1.11—so it is not just spares, is it?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** No, it is not.

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**Q8 Chairman:** It is training, it is other things as well.  
**Lieutenant General Applegate:** The issue is that there are new requirements. We get equipment to meet those new requirements: they feed into our system; we have to make a judgment as to whether the vehicle is deployed to operations, or is it deployed to operations and training. In the early days we just did not have enough equipment for the training regime, which is why we have been buying more over time. It is not a perfect situation but the UOR process is of course rather as it says on the tin, to meet an urgent operational need.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** Perhaps I could draw attention to one comment the NAO Report makes, which is in paragraph 1.7 which I strongly agree with, where they say, “. . . the Department has to make difficult judgments about the speed of delivery to theatre versus the maturity of the support and training solutions.” What that means is, if something really is urgently required in theatre at the point when it becomes available we have to choose between deploying it as quickly as we can and getting the benefit from it, with some issues around spares and availability for training purposes unresolved, or holding it back and suffering the operational damage that would entail.

**Q9 Chairman:** Can I ask the Air Marshal a question about the Lynx helicopter. It took you until December 2008 to decide on an Urgent Operational Requirement for Lynx, would you not have rather had Lynx earlier?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** The Lynx has been upgraded and that decision was taken, as you say. It is being upgraded with a new engine and of course the point you made yourself, the PUS has made, about the environment particularly applies to helicopters, where the combination of altitude, temperature and the overall environment means the aeroplanes, in this case helicopters, are very performance-limited. So it was a question of balancing that known fact with how to make a solution work. I think we have got to the point now where Lynx is going to be upgraded but I would add the point that, from my perspective as the Joint Commander, Lynx is but one machine in a very complex environment of operations in which we are part of a coalition. So, rightly, the NAO have focused very much on the UK contribution, but I can reassure the Committee and you, Mr Chairman, that we, the UK, are part of a bigger operation called the International Security Assistance Force, the campaign itself being commanded and managed by NATO, in which helicopters are part of the contribution so there are other nations who contribute helicopters and routinely can provide the roles, submissions and functions that something like a Lynx could provide.

**Q10 Chairman:** A simple question: do you have enough helicopters in Afghanistan?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** Commanders are content with the number of helicopters which are currently in Afghanistan. As the General indicated earlier, I go to the theatre frequently, as you can

imagine, and I always ask that question. Helicopters are not themselves a panacea for the operations we are in. You cannot use helicopters everywhere and you cannot use helicopters for everything we are doing. So with the current command arrangements the commanders are content we are doing all we can providing the helicopters they need.

**Mr Curry:** Sir Bill, a few hours ago the Deputy Prime Minister answered a question about what our objectives were in Afghanistan. Anybody listening to the answer must have been filled with utter and total despair and the conviction we were condemned to a war without a battle plan and without end. It was not just about defending British interests, it was all about what sort of Afghanistan we wanted and how we wanted the people to be educated in Afghanistan. As far as I am concerned, we go to war to defend my country's interests and not for any grander motives. There is no end to this. I just add that as an introduction. I have the Engineers in my constituency who are frequently in Afghanistan.

**Chairman:** We are not going to get sidelined into the great grand strategy of why we are in Afghanistan, this is about logistical support. That is perfectly fair comment—

**Nigel Griffiths:** It is not actually.

**Mr Mitchell:** It is!

**Nigel Griffiths:** Were you in Prime Minister's Question Time? I did not see you there. I was and I heard him.

**Chairman:** We are not going to get sidelined into this grand strategy, shall we get back to the logistics support?

**Q11 Mr Curry:** Sir Bill, how many soldiers have been killed by improvised explosive devices of the 170 who have died in Afghanistan?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I do not have the figure immediately available to me, but—

**Q12 Mr Curry:** The number has been escalating, has it not?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It has.

**Q13 Mr Curry:** Is it probably the biggest killer now of our soldiers?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It is certainly the biggest killer.

**Q14 Mr Curry:** If you look at page 17, paragraph 1.26, two issues arise. One is actually the design of the vehicles which the people travel in, and the fact they are not blast-proof. Things have been happening to them, but compared to the American vehicles they have been extraordinarily poorly designed to resist that sort of explosion. The second thing here is the electronic countermeasures and they say work is proceeding but they are extraordinarily heavy and soldiers have to carry between four and six spare batteries per day. What are we doing to actually protect our people, both in terms of what they might ride in and what they might carry, from what is now the biggest killer of our soldiers in Afghanistan? What sort of timescales are we talking about?

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**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** We are currently looking at ways of reducing the weight and power consumption of the heaviest ECM equipment and we are hopeful—one of my colleagues may be able to say more—that we will be able to deploy lighter equipment within a few months. I accept completely that this is the main threat and countermeasures are one of the most important things we are addressing.

**Q15 Mr Curry:** I suppose it is a truism that it is probably easier to construct a relatively simple device than it is to construct the equipment to either detect it or to disarm it?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It is.

**Q16 Mr Curry:** But that is now the principal weapon of the Taliban, is it not?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It is relatively easy and the other striking thing, particularly for those of us with Northern Irish experience, is how rapidly the other side have developed their capability to produce improvised explosive devices. We, as you say, with the challenge of finding ways of countering it, have to work very hard to match what they are doing.

**Q17 Mr Curry:** Do we know where they have acquired the capabilities from? Who has been teaching the Taliban to use these devices and how to make them and where their sources of material are?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I would not care to say.

**Q18 Mr Curry:** Do we have any idea?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** First of all, can I add our condolences to the Royal Engineers and point out that the Royal Engineers across the piece do a fantastic job.

**Q19 Mr Curry:** I entirely subscribe to that.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** Particularly in this area. What you are describing is an evolving threat and obviously the way we understand that threat and what we do to mitigate that threat is a very sensitive area because of our need to preserve operational security. There are two issues—

**Q20 Mr Curry:** I would be content with the assurance that you recognise the priority and this really is a very, very urgent priority. I do not want any information which might be helpful to anybody else.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** I can absolutely assure you that this is the highest priority within the main effort, and we are doing a great deal to provide protection with equipment, tactics, techniques and procedures, and I am sure, Mr Chairman, you would agree it is not appropriate for us to go into what those might be. Nor, I would suggest, is it appropriate for us to go into the intelligence picture on how our enemies derive what they field against us. Suffice to say, there is nothing higher than the priority we give to this and nor is it just limited to the vehicle itself or the patrol itself, it is a much more end-to-end approach we are adopting. I would add

that our vehicles, our equipment—and including in that statement the weight of the equipment—stands any comparison worldwide.

**Q21 Mr Curry:** While I have got you, Sir Stuart, could we just turn to aircraft. The first time I ever took a jet aeroplane was when I flew back from the United States in 1967 in a VC10. VC10s are still employed in our fleet along with, of course, the dear old Nimrod, the world's first ever jet airliner, which must date from the time of the Spanish Armada, and one of the oldest possible varieties of the Lockheed. We have very elderly aircraft, have we not, which are unserviceable for an unacceptably large amount of time? This is a crucial element. Why do we keep persisting in patching elderly machines? How long can we go on doing it before we decide we have to get a bit of kit which resembles the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** I will let General Dick comment on the equipment side.

**Q22 Mr Curry:** We really should have the politicians in front of us on this sort of inquiry, I realise that.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** The NAO Report, if I may say so, very helpfully brings out what we have done to improve the quality of the air bridge with the equipment we have. We have done a great deal of work in logistics support areas which General Dick commented on to improve the serviceability of those aeroplanes. The air bridge itself is a very complex undertaking over several thousand kilometres, involving many moving parts, involving a constantly changing picture for both people and freight. Given that uncertainty, the numbers which are in the Report paint an improving picture, and of course we do all we can to make sure that the way we modify those older aeroplanes is in accordance with the threat they face as well as the serviceability which is required of them through better availability contracts and better logistics support.

**Q23 Mr Curry:** Can you give us the assurance that every single aircraft we are using is equipped with the best possible devices to prevent fire? Do you remember the case of one of the Hercules which went down, I think it was?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** Where possible we provide—

**Q24 Mr Curry:** In no circumstances are we not doing things because of budgetary restraint where the lives of our servicemen are at stake?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** The main heavy lift aircraft, the C130s, are equipped with foam suppressants. We might just check the details of that and make sure we are not misleading you in any way about the extent to which the full range of these aircraft have got that capability, but the intention certainly is to ensure against the kind of accident which occurred with the Hercules.<sup>1</sup>

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**Q25 Mr Curry:** On training, what is so sacrosanct about the six-month spell of training so that everything is crammed into six months? I am looking at paragraph 3.9 on page 37 now. It does seem there is a real squeeze underway and not merely a squeeze in time but also on the kit which is available to do the training.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** Two points on that. The first is that there is nothing sacrosanct about the six months and the Army is changing its practice to ensure that mission-specific training generally occurs over a 15-month period rather than a six-month period. There is also an issue about the balance between, as it were, normal training for all purposes and specific training for deployment. Some of the material which is covered in the pre-deployment training, or has been in the past, will in future be dealt with in the more general training. As far as equipment is concerned, that has been an issue for the reason I touched on earlier, which is that when we get new equipments which are urgently needed in theatre the temptation and tendency is to deploy them as quickly as possible, but as a matter of fact even since this Report was written we have substantially increased the number of theatre-entry standard vehicles which are available for training courses pre-deployment. If I can give some figures. When the Report was written, for the Brigade currently preparing for Afghanistan there were 18 Mastiffs, there are now 43. There were 22 Jackals, there are now 56. So gradually we are beginning to build up to a situation where it is much more common for our pre-deployment training to involve training on theatre standard equipment.

**Q26 Mr Curry:** So the transition from the training ground to theatre is as easy as it can possibly be made?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** This makes perfect sense, but it comes back to the dilemma I mentioned earlier, that you have a limited amount to start with, so do you get it straight into theatre and thereby deprive those being trained of experience on it? Answer: yes, you do, but you then back up as quickly as possible with enough models of Mastiff or Jackal or whatever to ensure that pre-deployment training takes place.

**Q27 Mr Curry:** Finally, DFID announced a White Paper yesterday about a significant redeployment where there is stress, and Afghanistan was one of those. How realistic is it? Given that not all Afghanistan is Helmand, how realistic is it to try and run in tandem those sort of DFID-type programmes with a war where there is not a frontline and, insofar as there is one, where the frontline can change hugely between day and night? Is that realistic?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I think it is.

**Q28 Mr Curry:** How do you not get in each other's way?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** The Defence Select Committee had an interesting session on this a few weeks ago, to which I and my Permanent Secretary colleagues from DFID and the Foreign Office gave evidence. My own sense is that over the last few years, DFID's

attitude towards these operations has changed substantially; I think the White Paper is evidence of that. Certainly my own observation from visits to Lashkar Gar in particular is that sometimes the security conditions limit what can be done, but there is an increasingly capable joint effort in Lashkar Gar involving military and civilian, including DFID, working very closely together with the local administration to try to move the thing forward. So I would say challenging but realistic.

**Q29 Mr Touhig:** Sir Bill, when I was a Defence Minister we had a problem, the lack of medical personnel, and I readily confess I never managed to solve it when I was a minister in the Department but I have not been in the Department for three years. We see from Figure 27 on page 45 it is still a major problem. Why is that?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It is certainly the case that in some of the medical specialisms we are still short of the numbers of people we need. We tackle that, and have been tackling it, in a number of ways: through, for example, ensuring pay comparability with the National Health Service, which you will remember from your time as a Minister, Mr Touhig; through deploying medical staff on a tri-service or a single service basis; through the selective use of financial retention incentives for those staff whom we do have. It is certainly the case that for effect in theatre, we have to rely substantially and very beneficially, if I may say so, on reservists who happen to have medical backgrounds. The consequence is that we can confidently say that shortfalls in medical manpower have never resulted in Defence Medical Services being unable to meet operational commitments. What we have done has led to some shortage in this country.

**Q30 Mr Touhig:** From what I have seen myself, I am hugely impressed by the Defence Medical Services, but without reservists and the contractors we simply would not have the required medical services to deploy.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I think in recent times that has been true. It has not stopped us trying to build up to the level we need to be in terms of current medical manpower itself.

**Q31 Mr Touhig:** Is it basically coming down to issues which were there when I was there, pay, conditions and so on and so forth? If it is that, is that not a priority to address?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** We have been addressing it in the ways I described. We have introduced so-called golden hellos for staff joining in these medical specialisms. We have a system of financial retention incentives. We have made some progress, I do not have the figures in my brief, although I could provide them for the Committee if you would like to see them, but we are still some way short of where we ought to be.<sup>2</sup>

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**Q32 Mr Touhig:** Figure 27 on page 45 is a pretty appalling indictment, I think, is it not? We see anaesthetists where we have an operational requirement of 108 but we have 45 regulars to deploy. Neurosurgeons, 9 needed but none to deploy. Intensive care nurses, 92 needed, 47 to deploy. It does not seem any better than when I was there three years ago.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I would acknowledge completely this is still a difficulty for us and it is one we are working on. It is partly about supply, it is partly about, for some people, alternatives looking more attractive.

**Q33 Mr Touhig:** We see in paragraph 4.11 on page 45 that, "Medical reservists made up the majority of the hospital-based medical personnel in Afghanistan in 2007." Is this still the case?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I think it is. I do not know whether the CJO is able to confirm that?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** I am not able to confirm whether it is right now, but what I can confirm is that the performance of the staff is outstanding and no British casualty has ever suffered as a result of the details in the table. The two facts that these paragraphs do not show, and they are important facts, is, first, the way we use the aero-medical evacuation system to stabilise the patient and then bring the casualty back to the UK is a truly world-class performance by all involved and is very complex but works extremely well. That is of course partly palliative for what is shown here and, secondly, under very clear arrangements supported by the Surgeon General, we are also using coalition facilities where appropriate and in accordance with clinical governance.

**Q34 Mr Touhig:** I have no doubt that the highest priority is being given by those who are in the field to providing a first-class and world-class service to any of our boys who need any sort of medical help and support, but the point I am making is, if this was the case in 2007 and you are not sure whether it has improved, it should have improved, should it not?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It should and I am not for a moment denying we still have a problem in medical manpower. What I would say is that if you look at the outcomes, the Report in paragraph 11 says, in terms, that there is widespread confidence in the health care system in both theatres, so we are delivering the outcomes but we do still have an issue over manpower.

**Q35 Mr Touhig:** I accept that fully and that is to the credit of those involved, but without the reservists and contractors we simply would not have the medical resources to deploy to serious areas like Afghanistan.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I do not question that.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** I would like to add there, Mr Touhig, that I was in the hospital last week in Bastion and within that team there is a real sense of team between the regulars, the reservists and the contractors, who are using their medical skills and background for the mission, for the focus. So I do not think there is a distinction between regulars and

reservists, particularly with medical specialisations, and actually quite often the regulars would welcome the people with the qualifications.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** In my experience, it is one of the things which really boosts the reputation of the reservists among the regulars, that they make the contribution they are known to make.

**Q36 Mr Touhig:** I have no doubt, but there are other consequences, are there not? If you look at, again, page 45, paragraph 4.12, it says, "Some military medical roles do not have a civilian equivalent, such as combat medical technicians who are specifically trained in battlefield advanced trauma life support techniques. Shortfalls have meant that some regular medical personnel have deployed to theatre more frequently than planned and than is envisaged . . ." and it goes on, "For example, 19% of medical officers in the Royal Air Force have breached . . ." the Department's own guidelines. So people are being deployed more frequently because you have this serious problem which has not improved, in my view, in the three years since I left.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I certainly accept that as a consequence of the problem you have drawn attention to, the Harmony Guidelines are breached more regularly for staff in these groups than for the generality of the Infantry, for example. That is partly a consequence, as it is with the generality of all three Services, certainly the Air Force and the Army, of the intensity of our current deployment on operations. One might hope, and I certainly do hold out some hope, that reducing effectively from two medium-sized operations to one, as we withdraw from Iraq, will ease the position and the Harmony Guidelines generally and, therefore, may ease it for this group of staff as well.

**Q37 Mr Touhig:** I have no doubt about the commitment of the Department to try and do something about it, but it does seem in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that here we have a well-respected, wonderful Armed Forces we can be proud of in this country but we cannot somehow overcome a problem of providing proper, at least regular, medical support staff.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I accept that and all I would say is that it is not for want of trying, there has been a lot of effort put into this, as you will recall from your own time.

**Q38 Mr Touhig:** Can I turn to Box 18 on page 47 where we see that the number of attacks on the Basra Air Station increased from May 2006 and it was not until 2007 that the Department submitted a business case for the construction of improved Tier 3 structures. The Report then tells us that we spent £100 million on these structures and we are leaving them as empty shells and we are gifting them to the United States now. Is this not another example of the way the Department somehow fails to deliver value for money and deliver what is needed at the time?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I do not think so, with respect. It is true that the incidence of IDF attacks at the air station in Basra increased from the middle of 2006

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onwards. It was really only as we got into 2007 that it reached a level where the view taken by ministers and indeed by the Department in support of them was that we ought to invest in hardened accommodation of the so-called Tier 3 kind. We then set about doing so as quickly as we could, in a project where we had decision points built into it so that when we reached the stage where we knew that we were likely to be withdrawing from Iraq in the foreseeable future, we then arrested the development activity. I think we have actually managed to contain costs.

**Q39 Mr Touhig:** You have spent about £100 million. Were any of these structures ever used?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** Yes, they were.

**Q40 Mr Touhig:** I understand from the Report that most of them were shells so what did we do with them?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** The first tranche were certainly used and I have seen them being used in Basra myself. This was a very difficult judgment because at the point where it became clear that the intensity of the indirect fire attacks on the base was as it was, we all felt that the right thing to do was to invest in this sort of more effective protection, but we were also conscious that we were likely to be investing for benefit over a relatively short period. Certainly in relation to the first tranche of buildings they were constructed very quickly and they were used by our people for many months before we eventually withdrew.

**Q41 Mr Touhig:** Did the decision to provide these structures progress through the Department's procurement facility or was it a decision that was made separately?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It was dealt with I would say as if it was an urgent operational requirement under similar rapid procedures. It went out to contract with KBR and it was managed from the Joint Headquarters under CJO.

**Q42 Mr Williams:** The experience in Iraq showed us how vulnerable our equipment was to roadside mines. Why did you not see the need to give better armed protection to the logistics vehicles before we went to Afghanistan on the basis of that experience?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** Can you just repeat the question again. I got the bit about the logistics vehicles.

**Q43 Mr Williams:** Your experience showed you how vulnerable our equipment was in Iraq to roadside bombs. Why was it then that you did not ensure that the vehicles that went to Afghanistan were better protected?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** The answer is two-fold. To begin with the nature of the operations in Afghanistan was more fluid and they were not, if you like, mimicking what we saw in Iraq where you were moving along fixed routes and very predictable routes. That has changed over time. However, we were not happy just to stay with that position when

this manoeuvre phase was on hold. We introduced plans to upgrade our support vehicles so that they were armed and you will find now that we have armoured protection to our support vehicles on operations to reflect the increasing threat.

**Q44 Mr Williams:** But you introduced the Vector and you knew that its reliability was inadequate, it had limited armour to protect soldiers, and you knew the commanders' confidence in it was low and yet still you supplied them; why?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** The fact that they did not perform as we would wish happened afterwards. It was not the fact that commanders did not think Vector would be the right system to begin with. It was not the fact that the particular threat from IEDs was mature at the time. The nature of the requirement for Vector was to find an urgent replacement to the initial Snatch vehicles and at that stage the higher level of threat was actually from rocket propelled grenades rather than IEDs. They were then used differently and they were not one of our successes. We have in fact found the better route for the small, light vehicle—again going back to the fact that you need something like this in the short term—is to improve the Snatch, which we have now done. When they were brought in they met a requirement as stated to meet a particular need. The need has changed, the threat has changed, so therefore we change either the protection to that vehicle or replace that vehicle with something else. I would just remind you that the enemy does get a vote in this and unfortunately he is not always predictable.

**Q45 Mr Williams:** Then take the Mastiff, only 20% of the Mastiff fleet was classified as fit in 2008 with a further 53% only able to undertake a limited role. Why was our equipment so inadequate for the task that it was facing?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** I go back to what I was saying earlier on. We took a judgment to put Mastiff into theatre in fact before the IED threat in Afghanistan was as mature as it is now. The principal reason for buying Mastiff was in fact for Iraq but we put in as a contingency some of the Mastiff into Afghanistan. We did not at that stage know what the impact would be on driving cross country with Mastiff. In that instance we were also limited in the amount of spares that we could obtain from the US system, but again we recognised that there may be risks and you will notice also that the availability of Mastiff improved quickly and has continued to improve. I really go back to this early point: if it was a deliberate equipment procurement we would have time to do the modelling, we would have time to manage the industrial base, and we would, if necessary, build up larger amounts of stock before deploying on to operations. In this particular instance, when we made these judgments, that was something of a luxury and what we try to do is to give good enough as quickly as possible and continue to improve over time. That is either in the area of logistics support or it is in the area of further protection from a new threat.

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**Q46 Mr Williams:** We have vehicle equipment which was inadequate for both centres of operation and then we find that the Merlin and Apache were short of spare parts.

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** Merlin and Apache were also brought in earlier than was planned. We took a judgment we would bring in Apache some three years earlier than originally planned because of its impact on operations. Despite the problems you will notice with spares, we have always exceeded the flying hours in Apache and it has provided absolutely critical support. It is one of those difficult things I have to manage on a daily basis. I would love a perfect world, but I am afraid I am not in it. So from that perspective, the aim is to ensure that we deploy as soon as we can a good enough piece of equipment to give our people confidence and to grow it over time. I think that must be the best thing to do rather than wait for a perfect solution some years hence and then during that time I am afraid we would lose lives. So we have to make those difficult calls and it is a conversation that the likes of myself and the CJOs have frequently, and we make those decisions recognising there may be some limitations, but these are difficult times.

**Q47 Mr Williams:** Can you give us an assurance there is now an adequate availability of those?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** Absolutely. In addition, you will notice in the Report where there are other figures, availability on our other combat equipment was exceeding the targets. As I say, this is not a matter of a general systemic failing, it is as a result of us having to take early decisions on new capabilities to meet new threats, and those new threats emerge continuously. This is not a static zone as far as Afghanistan is concerned: the threat is dynamic and the nature of the tactics used is dynamic as well. Naturally enough our equipment is adapted over time to reflect that.

**Q48 Mr Williams:** In the type of operation which is having to be undertaken in some of the most extremely difficult circumstances one could envisage, and we all accept that, why did it take you until December last year to increase the number of satellite phones which do make an enormous difference in the communications abilities obviously of the men at the front?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** Primarily getting approval, the money to do it, and we will still need more satellite phones.

**Q49 Mr Williams:** What you are saying is that there is still not an adequate supply?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** The CJO might want to come in, but the lay down of troops changes, which means to say the requirement for different types of communications, changes. You have more patrol bases, more dispersed operations, so a requirement for the communications layout changes. We are not dealing with a static environment in which you can then have a rather predictive approach to the delivery of equipment.

**Q50 Mr Williams:** What is the time lag between identifying a need for more satellite phones, to take a simple example, and being able to get hold of them? Do you have reserves? Is industry able to meet your needs?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** That is a very good question. It varies on the type of equipment. Broadly, if you look at the way we deliver the urgent operational requirements at the moment, which is really what you are focusing on, we have about 300 urgent operational requirements running at any one time. Some are relatively simple, some are very, very complex, and they can take on average about eight months. Some are quicker than that, some are later. Generally it tends to revolve around a number of items. First of all, the degree of integration challenge. We had a discussion earlier about electronic countermeasures. One of the reasons why we cannot just go out and buy a vehicle and fuel it, is that we have to fit communications and a very sophisticated suite of electronic countermeasures into these vehicles to ensure we have confidence we can deal with the IED threat. So that can be a determining factor, the degree of complexity and the amount of integration and sub-systems. Another one is the industrial base. We do not have an industry globally which has lots of stock on the shelf. To give an example, to replace missiles, I have to give forward warnings of some two to two and a half years.

**Q51 Mr Williams:** How much?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** Two to two and a half years for our American sources. It is just the fact that the global industrial base does not have lots of spare stock.

**Q52 Mr Williams:** That is an incredible situation to be in.

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** It is but I cannot rail against it. I can do in some instances selective work, for example, in areas like armour, to invest in R and D, and when we buy abroad in some instances. Those are the time lines. And not just for us.

**Mr Williams:** If you have an extra need now in two and a half years' time you may get a response to your question?

**Q53 Mr Curry:** What sort of missiles are we talking about?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** I would prefer not to go into that now if you do not mind. I can let you know afterwards.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** If I could go back, Mr Williams, to the snapshot in the Report, the situation has improved. Again, I was with the Logistic Supply Regiments last week and they are very pleased with their new supply vehicles, which are armoured. The Mastiff spares situation has improved thanks to the work that General Dick has

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alluded to, and in terms of satellite phones, if you are talking about operational communications then that is one element that we obviously manage as our lay down changes. If you are talking about satellite phones for personal communication, for welfare purposes, then we are in the process of moving the equipment that was used for those purposes in Iraq to Afghanistan to improve the availability.

**Q54 Mr Williams:** One can understand our state of unpreparedness in one way because of the preoccupations we had in Iraq but we already had the experience of seeing the Soviet Army defeated in Afghanistan, so when we went in there why were we so unaware of the nature and scale of the unique hazards that our troops were going to face?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I do not think it is the case that we were unaware of them, but it is certainly the case that the actual experience of engagement in Afghanistan in the last few years has greatly impacted on our requirements including the urgent ones that we have been discussing. One thing I would say is that if we revert to the Report, which is the trigger for this hearing, when the NAO's staff went to Iraq and Afghanistan the Report, in paragraph 1.9, says that confidence in UOR vehicles' reliability and protection among Armed Forces personnel they spoke to in both theatres was high. I take some comfort from that but I do not deny that we have to keep on top of it and we have to keep moving flexibly to respond to the situation as it develops.

**Q55 Mr Williams:** Sorry that was going to be my final question but you said "respond flexibly". We have already heard about the inflexibility that is in the system. There is a contradiction between your need to act rapidly and the capacity of your supply sources to meet your needs.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It is certainly the case that one of the limiting factors over this period has been what is actually on the market, whatever it is that we are trying to acquire, but within that constraint we have, I believe, moved very flexibly and rapidly, particularly in protected vehicles, to scan the market, to work out what is likely to be a better protected version of what we are currently using, for example, to replace the Snatch. Undoubtedly, there are industrial constraints but within these constraints we have moved as fast as we could.

**Q56 Dr Pugh:** Sir Bill, with all this complex discussion I am losing the wood for the trees a little bit so perhaps you could assist me. If we talk about Afghanistan for the moment, what is the total annual cost of the operation in Afghanistan or what was it for the last financial year?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** A figure of between £1 billion and £2 billion sticks in my mind but unless one of my colleagues has it exactly we had better supply it.

**Q57 Chairman:** Between £1 billion and £2 billion?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** Yes.

**Q58 Chairman:** That is quite a big gap.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It is a big gap. It is £1.something billion. I ought to know but I will provide the figure.<sup>3</sup>

**Q59 Dr Pugh:** Accepting that we are dealing in broad brush figures I was trying to think how that £1 or £2 billion was made up. One element in that presumably is ordering specialist big capital items, new orders, and stuff like that. Additionally there will be the salaries of those people serving out there and additionally what you might call basic supplies and procurement that you need in any operation at any time. Breaking down that £1 or £2 billion into elements, which is the biggest element of those three?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It is not the salaries of deployed people because they are met from the defence budget in the ordinary fashion.

**Q60 Dr Pugh:** Can I just stop you there. I accept if you talk about net and gross cost you are going to have to pay some of these people whether they in Afghanistan or not, but presumably there is the salary bill you get because you are taking along reservists and asking them to do things that they would not normally be paid for, and you are taking on specialist staff out in Afghanistan to support the serving soldiers, so there is some sort of salary bill there presumably?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** The costs that fall to be met from the reserve are the additional costs of deployment. That means all the costs in theatre. That means additional costs, exactly, involving reserves for example.

**Q61 Dr Pugh:** So does that £1 to £2 billion exclude standard Service salary costs?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It does, yes

**Q62 Dr Pugh:** Okay therefore in terms of purchase of services and supplies, if we take out the big ticket items, ordering new helicopters and so on, if we were to analyse and drill down further there is a range of things you would be ordering, you would be ordering medical supplies, you would be ordering munitions, you would be ordering general support and resources, if you were to give me a percentage, as it were, of how much of the supplies is munitions, how much is medical supplies, and how much is general support resources, could you give a breakdown of that?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** We could provide such a figure but unless Sir Stuart can do so now I think we had better offer to provide the Committee with a note on that.<sup>4</sup>

**Q63 Dr Pugh:** Okay. When things go wrong in any Service, whether it is the Army or the emergency services and where there are wounded soldiers and fatalities and so on, presumably there is a substantial incremental increase in costs, is there not, and

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<sup>3</sup> *Note by Witness:* The witness had in mind the total net additional cost of operations in Afghanistan 2007–08, which was £1.504 billion. The equivalent figure for 2008–09 was £2.623 billion.

<sup>4</sup> Ev 22

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therefore the more fatalities you get the more injuries you get the higher the costs go up by an appreciable factor? Is that right?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** The cost of operations is more to do with the very substantial cost of the logistics chain which we have been discussing, moving equipment. It is to do with contracts in theatre with local contractors, for example. It is to do with the whole range of essential support that is necessary to have a deployed armed force. Desperately sad as casualties are, I do not believe that our costs are tremendously sensitive to the level of casualties.

**Q64 Dr Pugh:** That is the answer I want. Can we turn to supplies then. I look at this lovely diagram showing where they went and where they came from and the rather convoluted progress they sometimes made. Presumably though there is an element of basic resource that any operation needs that does not need to come by the UK via a long journey that is able to be resourced locally and therefore benefit the local population and their economy or that can be resourced regionally and need not come all the way from the UK. In terms of the supplies provided for operations in Afghanistan, again, can I ask you to give me a percentage figure of how much is resourced or provided locally, how much is provided regionally and how much comes all the way from the UK?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** What I can say is that there is a desire on our part to source as much as we can locally or regionally, not least for the reason you are implying which is to inject some money into the Afghan economy because to do so contributes to the operation. I could not put a figure on it unless General Dick can.

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** The vast majority is brought in because of the nature of Afghanistan itself and quite what it has by way of national resource and ability for us to lean on it. You can imagine things like construction stores are very much attempted to be sourced from theatre. We have been doing some work with regard to provision of some foods but there is an element of having to be careful how we do that. We are very alert in attempting to do the most we can to try and source much more from Afghanistan for all the reasons you say, but in addition to that so that it reduces the burden on our overall supply chain.

**Q65 Dr Pugh:** It would be very useful if we could receive a note precisely on that.<sup>5</sup> I was looking at the casualties in Afghanistan. There appears to be a frightening increase certainly in the number of wounded but also a substantial increase in the number of fatalities. We get weekly sad reminders of that. How does that relate to the actual number of soldiers out there? In other words, one assumes that although fatalities have gone up also the number of soldiers in operational activity out there has increased as well. Can you give some barometer of how dangerous it is getting or not getting?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It is certainly the case that there must be some correlation between the size of our deployed force and the casualties we take. I would not say it was a very exact one because it depends greatly on the nature of the threat and the way in which our people are deployed at any one time. As it happens, in Afghanistan, subject to a recent increase to boost support over the election period, our deployment has been pretty constant for a couple of years.

**Q66 Dr Pugh:** But you could not give me a figure of wounded per thousand soldiers or whatever and compare it with other years?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** We could. Such comparisons do exist both over time and by comparison with other countries.<sup>6</sup>

**Q67 Dr Pugh:** I do not want to draw you into policy but clearly some of the soldiers out in Afghanistan will be in a sense policing territory already held. Some other soldiers will be involved in fighting against the Taliban and winning back territory that the Taliban have gained in one way or another. Are you able to give an indication of what the balance of soldiers are doing?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I think that is much harder. I will ask Air Marshal Stuart to say something but the truth is that it is a more confused picture than that and over time what our people are actually doing varies depending on the operational requirement.

**Q68 Dr Pugh:** Can I tell you where I am trying to go and what I am trying to price in a sense, and it may be a rather crude way of doing things and it may be not wholly appropriate in all circumstances, but per yard in Afghanistan there ought to be a figure in terms of cost and in terms of the human cost as well. I am trying to get to that figure and I am wondering whether you can provide it.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** Conceptually it is an interesting way of approaching the issue but I would be very surprised if we could quantify it in exactly the way you are describing.

**Chairman:** I am not entirely sure how relevant this is to the Report so if we could leave that on one side.

**Dr Pugh:** I have finished, Chairman.

**Chairman:** Thank you very much. Austin Mitchell?

**Q69 Mr Mitchell:** I get the impression from this Report that our defence force is going to be splendidly equipped with Eurofighters and nuclear submarines and aircraft carriers and that kind of high-tech stuff to fight a war that is not going to happen any more but they cannot perform adequately on the ground because you are fighting a very different terror.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I think it is wrong to say that they have not have performed adequately on the ground. I think our deployed Armed Forces in Iraq and Afghanistan have acquitted themselves extremely well.

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<sup>5</sup> Ev 20

<sup>6</sup> Ev 20

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**Q70 Mr Mitchell:** They have operated well but not at maximum efficiency because of the under-car devices, explosives, mines, all this kind of thing. It has taken a steady toll and we are not equipped to deal with it.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It is the last part of that that I would contest. None of us, because we all care about this, can feel completely satisfied with what has been achieved over the last few years but what I found to be reassuring about this Report was that as the NAO went into it in more detail they found in every significant area confidence in theatre and elsewhere in what we were achieving, whether it was personnel talking about UOR vehicles or Brigadier Carlton-Smith, who was the task force commander last year, and is quoted in the Report as saying: "The British force deployed to Helmand in summer 2008 was one of the best equipped ever put into the field." There was widespread confidence in the healthcare system, paragraph 11, "the successful delivery of a deployable welfare package", and paragraph 4.23 says: "Personnel in theatre were in the main complimentary about the quality of the kit they received." This is not a bad Report actually.

**Q71 Mr Mitchell:** Things are improving but paragraph 1.5 gives a picture of the atrocious conditions they are being asked to fight in. Let me ask a simple question—I am a bit simple minded—is any consideration given to the kind of conditions they are going to fight in and whether the equipment is relevant to those kinds of conditions? When a Prime Minister decides to invade Iraq or another Prime Minister decides to make Afghanistan safe for democracy or opium growing or whatever we do—

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I cannot speak for the Prime Ministers of the day.

**Q72 Mr Mitchell:** --- what consideration is given to equipment capability to fight in the areas where the Government decides to fight?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** Within the Department very significant thought is given to the conditions in which we are deploying people and equipping them. As I think this session has brought out though, it is also the case that experience and the requirements that it gives rise to can change over time, but this is something we think hard about because in the end it is our job to think carefully about exactly how best to deal with the conditions into which we are deploying our people.

**Q73 Mr Mitchell:** As the Chairman pointed out at the start, you have spent £4.2 billion quid on urgent operational requirements, which indicates that their equipment was not really ready for the job that it has been asked to tackle. I am struck by the question that Alan Williams asked and that is roadside bombs and bombs in culverts have been a standard part of guerrilla warfare. That is what the IRA did in Northern Ireland until we blocked all the culverts and people stopped going to the lavatory. The same in Iraq. Why were we not ready for it?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I think to a degree we were but all I would say is that in the real conditions in these theatres the nature of the threat changes over time and that is really what we have to respond to and respond to as agilely as we can.

**Q74 Mr Mitchell:** The Report says in table 2 on page 10 that those kinds of mines and roadside devices were low level stuff in 2006, they escalated in 2007, and then in 2008 it has gone up not exponentially but it has gone up substantially, and yet you were not considering how to deal with it, the Report indicates, until September 2008 after this big increase in these roadside explosions which are killing people?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I think the history of this period is a little more complicated than that in the sense that on protected vehicles we have been using the urgent operational requirements procedure since considerably earlier than 2008 to replace much of what was there, to respond to the inadequacies of the Snatch vehicle in particular, although it still is a vehicle that commanders find useful for some purposes. It is also the case however that as we got into 2008 there was another push to add to the protected vehicle fleet, as announced by the then Secretary of State in the latter part of last year. It has been a steady picture of responding as quickly as we could.

**Q75 Mr Mitchell:** The procurement of specially armoured vehicles which could resist this kind of attack did not really begin until September 2008 as I read the Report.

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** That is not true.

**Q76 Mr Mitchell:** It is all going to come on supply and be available in 2009. That is a bit late.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** If you look at table 3 just below the one that you have quoted, Mr Mitchell, there is a long timeline there from 2005 onwards which is punctuated by the deployment of more suitable, more advanced standard vehicles and it is a period during which we have kept adding to the stock and we have kept responding as best we could to changes in threat.

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** I think you will notice particularly from that table where Mastiff was coming in in 2006, and if you look at the IED threat what we tended to find is as the enemy's options are closed down—they attempted to fight us in the open for example in Afghanistan and they lost so they changed their tactics. And, similarly, we started operating in zones which up until then we had not been in where they had had time to prepare—over time that has developed. You will notice that we began putting extra protected vehicles in much earlier than 2008 and we have carried on doing that.

**Q77 Mr Mitchell:** But they really only came on in big supply in 2009.

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** The particular increase is this year, you are correct, in the numbers deployed in Afghanistan.

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*Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:* Continuous adaptability is the phrase I would use, Mr Mitchell, ie, it is not just about protected mobility. As the threat has evolved so the approach to the campaign has evolved.

**Q78 Mr Mitchell:** If you know before that mines and under vehicle explosions are going to be more frequently unleashed, and each war we have fought has indicated that their use is increasing you have got to think it through and be prepared in advance.

*Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:* And we do think it through. We have seen how the vehicles have evolved. We have talked earlier on about the way our tactics have evolved and how electronic countermeasures have evolved. What this Report has not indicated is the way that all the things that are not here have also evolved, whether it is the intelligence available to reconnaissance and so on. The enemy changes the way he responds to us after losing tactically. We then respond and of course over time that threat has changed and we have changed a lot when we have faced it.

**Q79 Mr Mitchell:** I am spending a fortune on devices that tell me where there are speed cameras ahead in my car and I have a number of endorsements. Why is there no electronic way of detecting mines ahead or underneath or whatever? Are we in a situation where these vehicle flails are the only way we have got of detecting mines?

*Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:* We cannot in this open environment but we could in another environment, as we have done with the Select Committee, talk to you about the sorts of things we do. I can just tell you that there are more than you might possibly imagine and it is very rapid in the way it has adapted and it is the best in the world, which is why the Americans have in the past asked us for help.

*Sir Bill Jeffrey:* I had a briefing on this subject from a very enthusiastic team in our Defence Equipment and Support organisation a few months ago and they are thinking on their feet and the technology is evolving quite rapidly. I have to say it is a lot more complicated than your Sat Nav.

*Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:* The fact that many other nations come to us for advice in this area I think is something of a testimony.

**Q80 Mr Mitchell:** Just let me ask about vehicles. We have had a positive wolf pack of vehicles coming in. The Mastiff which comes from America had 176 axle breaks in a year and its availability, as Alan Williams said, is pretty low and US suppliers are required to divert their production to American troops rather than sending us the stuff when we need it. Have we got round that problem yet?

*Sir Bill Jeffrey:* We have now. There was a period after the Mastiffs were deployed when two things happened. The first was that we started off using them on road as a protected transport vehicle. We then decided for operational reasons that it would be better to use them on patrols cross country, not least to make them less vulnerable to attack, but doing so

meant that spares consumption went up very significantly. The nature of the commercial arrangement with the supplier was such that we could not get spares as quickly as we needed them. We did a deal which allowed another supplier to meet our requirement for spares.

**Q81 Mr Mitchell:** Is that a problem with American suppliers?

*Sir Bill Jeffrey:* I think it can be.

*Lieutenant General Applegate:* It can be, very much so. In addition to this the company that was producing them was quite small and they were in danger at one time of not being able to meet ours and the Marine Corps' needs so it needed careful management. As far as we are concerned, it was a temporary problem, we are over the top of it. It does have an impact on when we buy for example from America to reassure ourselves that we have preferential access to the stock because you can imagine in the US people, like yourselves, are asking the same question as to why is the stock not going to Americans in order to meet their needs.

*Sir Bill Jeffrey:* As a result of a commercial agreement which has been reached, we are now able to source spares for Mastiff for the UK from another company.

**Q82 Mr Mitchell:** The matter of the Vector sounds fairly disastrous. I see its original name sounded like a big box on wheels, the Pinzgauer or whatever. Does that mean it was German?

*Sir Bill Jeffrey:* The basic model was.

*Lieutenant General Applegate:* It was Austrian originally and then it was a UK company and a UK company that is now owned by BAE Systems. So, as ever, they change hands.

**Q83 Mr Mitchell:** Why was it deployed if it was such a disaster and everybody hates it?

*Lieutenant General Applegate:* The Pinzgauer first of all was part of our fleet. We had a discussion earlier on about how we used our existing equipment fleet, and so the initial deployment occurred with Pinzgauer which was an early example. As I mentioned earlier on, we then looked for what might be available quickly to deal with the perceived threat against Snatch. This was the best that was available at the time. It was used differently. It has not met our hopes so effectively we have limited its use and we are finding other vehicles to replace it. This is the Vector vehicle. It is still better than the original Pinzgauer and the soldiers still prefer it to the original vehicle they had when they were originally driving around in 2006.

**Q84 Mr Burstow:** Can I just start by going back to helicopters and particularly Merlin and Apache helicopters. We understand these are not part of the urgent operational requirements programme but they have been in service for some time. Could you just explain why it is that there have been insufficient spares available to keep them in the air?

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**Lieutenant General Applegate:** As I mentioned earlier on again, in fact the Apache was accepted into service and deployed on service three years earlier than our original plan so it was not in service in the way you describe it. Merlin was also in terms of this in its early stages and stock was still being built up on assumptions of the past which did not include a major deployment in Afghanistan. In both those instances the stock levels were very immature and that is why we have been building them up over time.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** The position now, if I understand it, is much better.

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** The position now—and I go back to the availability levels—despite those problems, we have met the availability requirements routinely for helicopters and in fact in terms of the hours concerned we have managed to increase them beyond most other people in the world.

**Q85 Mr Burstow:** The Report goes on to discuss the way in which you dealt with that transition to get the supplies you needed and cannibalisation was part of that. What are the implications of that for the training of aircrew? What impact has that had long term?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** As I understand it, the NAO's comment on this I think primarily relates to in the UK where we did bring two of the Apaches out of what was our reserve stock and use them in the short term. There has been some short-term swapping of items between aircraft in theatre to keep generating the necessary hours. But I think, as far as we are concerned within the UK, that is a less rosy picture and I think as the Report makes out we have been effectively prioritising our support to operations to an extent at the expense of what goes on in the UK. So we are in a difficult balance. It is one of those things about the changing nature of these operations as we manage our helicopter stocks (because we are managing it for the long term) and that means to say that we are using our helicopters and stores at a rate which is capable of being sustained. Similarly, we are training our people at a rate which can be sustained over time. We have as appropriate the ability—and indeed we did so for the moving of the turbine to Kajaki have the ability—to surge in theatre and produce higher quantities of helicopter hours for example. But routinely we try and make sure that we are in the business for a marathon rather than a quick sprint.

**Q86 Mr Burstow:** At the moment you are saying there is no implication for the training of aircrew in respect of helicopters in the UK?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** At the moment, no, because we make sure the demand and what can be done in UK are in balance. If we did much more in theatre for example I would have a great concern. That is a conversation again I routinely have, as I know the CJO does with Commander Joint Helicopter Command.

**Q87 Mr Burstow:** On the point about demand, you mean demand in the UK for training?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** Demand on operations is driving training demand in the UK.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** It is also how to support the operations through training to prepare, so it is the preparation to deploy which we have to focus on in the UK as well as then the ability to manage the crews carefully to make sure their skills do not fade.

**Q88 Mr Burstow:** That leads me on rather nicely to another related point which is this issue of hibernating certain skills that are trained for, which is covered on page 40 in paragraph 3.23. Can you tell us a bit more about the impact for example that not training pilots to make night landings on aircraft carriers and so on has in terms of the degrading of the skills base that aircrew have?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** Of course the situation has changed since the Report was issued and the Harriers, as I am sure the Committee is aware, have returned to the UK and as a priority they will be picking up that skill. The Tornado has now taken over from the Harrier.

**Q89 Mr Burstow:** I think the issue is—and maybe you can answer this—what is the current situation in respect of what is currently being hibernated. In the past particular things were perhaps hibernated because of particular deployments of equipment and personnel. What is currently being hibernated? Is that an on-going strategy of hibernating certain training needs to allow deployment?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** I would not say it is a strategy. It is more of a technique by which we manage the situation we are in. It is something that we would wish to avoid if possible.

**Q90 Mr Burstow:** In that regard given that it is the case that you are using it as an on-going tactic, albeit at different times different skills are being hibernating—and I am not quite sure that it is an appropriate word anyway but I am going to carry on using it because the Report does—how long does it take to re-establish this? How long do you then have to invest in training to get that back?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** It depends very much on the skill and the experience of the individual. In the case of air crew who are experienced it might be as simple as one sortie or one mission. In the case of a less experienced air crew who is new to that particular skill or technique, then it might require a package. It very much depends on the fleet. It very much depends on fixed and rotary wing and so on. So it would be hard for me to give you a direct answer. It would depend on the role of the fleet. For example, the Harrier is our only fast jet that operates off carriers, therefore that is the only requirement. I could go on to many other fleets and many other examples.

**Q91 Mr Burstow:** Probably in the time it is best not to but I am grateful that you could. Can I pick up one other thing which is picked up on page 38,

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paragraph 3.15 regarding deployment of individuals and the amount of predeployment training that they receive prior to deployment which is as little as five days. Is that really adequate to allow for the deployment of an individual into theatre?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** It is less than it could be and I believe that we are building up the amount of training that individuals get when they are being deployed.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** We are. There are a number of elements here. The process is designed for large formed units and, as we indicated in answers to earlier questions, we keep our process of training constantly under review so that we learn the lessons from the units in theatre. Those lessons are then applied back to individual reinforcement training. We fully accept that since this Report was written individual reinforcement training needs more attention. I reassure the Committee that it is now getting that attention.

**Q92 Mr Burstow:** So no-one will be deployed with as little as five days training now?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** I would always hesitate to say that no-one will but I would certainly hope not and I am very confident talking to those responsible for this in the single Services that they are definitely increasing the amount of individual reinforcement training.

**Q93 Mr Burstow:** What sort of risks are associated with that rapid deployment of individuals into theatre?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** It goes back to an answer to an earlier question from Dr Pugh. The complexity of the battle space is such that the training requirement to act as a formed unit in a close-quarter fighting environment is obviously different to the training requirement in a headquarters supporting the operation but not routinely deployed. We do differentiate between those sorts of training packages and there is—and I think it is covered in the Report—a very prescriptive sequence to qualify people for training. That is certified training. In other words, in old terms there is a test before you move to the next stage. There is then a consolidated period of training for the unit. There is then a consolidated period of training for the brigade before they are certified to deploy. We keep that process continuously under review and we also keep under review the training for civilians who deploy as support to the force, which is a package that PUS has led on, and we make sure that those personnel drawn from the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force do similar and appropriate training.

**Q94 Mr Burstow:** One of the reasons I am interested in this review process that you describe is that on page 45, paragraph 4.14, there is a discussion of the way in which you deal with mental health issues arising from deployment and there is a discussion there about the benefits of decompression. The thing that struck me was that it appears that decompression is not an appropriate approach for individuals who are deployed and I just wondered

because the Report does not say anything about that, and I would assume there must be some risks to mental health associated with individual deployments, just what approach is taken to the mental health care of individuals.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** If I may suggest, this is a snapshot. I have recently visited the professional facilities and again for security reasons I would rather not say where they were. They do now encompass the formed unit and the individual reinforcement. We are very sensitive to the question you have just asked because one size certainly does not fit all. The package is constantly monitored and constantly developed through experience. There is a theme back for the individuals that go through it. I can honestly assure the Committee that it is very much appreciated by everyone who goes through it. It does not look the same as it did last year and it will not look next year the same as it does this year.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** The decompression process is valuable in its own terms. I do not think it is what we invest most hope in in terms of identifying post traumatic stress disorder. For that purpose I think the Trauma Risk Incident Management methodology that the Report describes is potentially more valuable because it involves colleagues in theatre looking out for the warning signs and it is what we ought to be alert to.

**Q95 Mr Burstow:** And that is what applies to those individuals who are being deployed after more than five days of training?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** It is and it is very much again breaking new ground. A number of other nations are looking at the way we do this.

**Q96 Mr Burstow:** It would be useful to have a slight expansion of that in the form of a note because it was one thing I noticed as I was going through that did not seem to be covered.<sup>7</sup> The answers that you have been giving demonstrate the Herculean efforts that are being made to deploy what you can to support people on the ground, but there are clearly some consequences to that—cannibalising equipment, hibernating various training skill-sets—and I wondered what the risk was when it comes to apparently prioritising the urgent need to have the people on the ground to fight the wars we are fighting against the long-term competences and capacities preparedness?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** This is the strategic issue that in some ways I started with. We have to prioritise in the short term. We have to say that success in these operations is our highest priority. We also have a responsibility to the future. I think it is inescapable that some of the effects that you have described, particularly given we have been deploying above the levels that have been planned for, will result. Our responsibility is to minimise them to the extent we can, particularly with the draw down in Iraq and to begin to rebuild capability for the next time.

**Mr Burstow:** My time is up.

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**Q97 Geraldine Smith:** I think our Service personnel who have gone to Iraq and Afghanistan are extremely brave because these are very dangerous places to be. Can you give me an assurance that no British soldier has lost their life because of inadequate equipment or inadequate support or lack of training?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I think it is hard to give the absolute assurance that you seek. All I can say is that all of us who are involved in this know that that is the issue at stake and people right across the Department are working to ensure that the equipment meets that requirement, but one can never be certain. The causes of casualties are many and complex. I think it would be dishonest of me to give you the absolute assurance that you seek. I believe honestly we have come pretty close to it because of the effort that the Department has been investing over this period both military and civilian.

**Q98 Geraldine Smith:** You can appreciate how important it is to families of Service personnel to know that their loved ones who are going into very dangerous situations have got the support and proper equipment. That is essential. As a Member of Parliament, I have to go back to those people and assure them that we are doing everything possible and you are doing everything possible.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** The other reassurance I can give you is in the Report, although some of the media coverage of this topic would suggest serious shortcomings in equipment, what this Report reveals is that there is a high level of confidence in that equipment in theatre. Our own internal surveys of the Armed Forces have shown an upward trend in confidence in equipment. One of the challenges we face is that this is not yet reflected in public opinion, but our own people, I feel, believe that they are better served in theatre in terms of equipment than was the case in the past.

**Q99 Geraldine Smith:** I think there was some truth in that and in the Report, but there are also some shortfalls as well. I find it amazing that there could have been a lack of bottled water in a camp in the desert last year, you were way down on supplies. When I look at another paragraph and see that some of those soldiers are carrying more than their bodyweight in equipment, up to 14 stone of equipment, can we not get lighter weight equipment and why does it take so long to do that?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** On your last point, one of the main focuses of our development effort is to identify lighter weight materials, as we were discussing earlier.

**Q100 Geraldine Smith:** How long does that take? For a poor soldier with all that weight in those unbearable hot conditions, it is no good saying, "We will have it right in a year or two".

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** The best I can say to you is that everybody who goes back sees a dramatic improvement from the last time they were there. I hate to bring the element of reality to this but if, for example, we want to issue a new type of body

armour—and we are just issuing another new type of body armour which is just as good in terms of protection but is easier to wear and, therefore, reduces some of the element of the load—we have to design it, approve it and we have to manufacture at least 10,000 of those. They are not available on the market. I cannot go to Body Armour R Us, it does not exist. I cannot go necessarily to a defence supplier who has stock on the shelf which is of a standard we want and what our families and I would wish to have as a soldier. This really is dynamic. The threat changes because what we produced last time has inhibited our opponents from achieving the success they want so they will use a new tactic, a new weapon. We hope to be in front of it on occasions and, therefore, to pre-empt the threat developing and work both with the industry and also with our own research base to develop it and we need to manufacture it when that threat matures. The point about the responsiveness is it is highly unlikely, except in certain instances with electronic countermeasures, that I could respond within a month to a complex need: a new vehicle with integrated electronic countermeasures, integrated command communications which would meet the level of protection that we would wish to see in that short time space. I can assure you that we constantly seek to improve the protection and the ability of our soldiers to deal with these challenging circumstances.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** On kit, I have now been visiting both theatres for three and a half years and I have detected a very significant change in that period. Indeed, the NAO's investigators found the same. In theatre our people will speak well of the kit, which was not the case a few years ago. They are comfortable with the modern kit. It can be very heavy and we are taking steps to address that, but it is more popular than it was.

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** Rather like the PUS and CJO, I go there routinely too just to make sure that there are improvements. If you looked at the way our soldiers were equipped two years ago, there is nothing which is the same now. It is totally, completely new and continues to be improved, be it in the nature of their general clothing, their weaponry, the way in which they are protected and the equipment they have. I would hope that people will take heart. A lot of it is invisible because I am afraid most of the headlines deal with perhaps one element of the issue and do not look at the totality. I measure my performance against what the soldiers think: are they convinced. Everything else can be spin elsewhere but, believe you me, they are quite vociferous when I go to talk to them and I take people in if something is wrong.

**Q101 Geraldine Smith:** So you no longer have examples of, say, soldiers having to buy their own equipment?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** No.

**Q102 Geraldine Smith:** That has changed?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** There will always be an issue over boots. I was having a chat two weeks ago and we have currently got three different types

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of boots which are probably the most expensive and best in the world. In addition, I have just sent out another 10,000 jungle boots because they are living in water for a while. I said to this chap, "Oh, I see you have got a different pair of boots, are they any better?" and he said, "No, but I like them", so I said, "Okay, thank you for that". I will then monitor that to see if there is a trend which has developed with a different type of boot and if there is we will buy more of those. Soldiers do occasionally buy the odd boot or backpack but, as far as buying items before they deploy now, it is absolutely nowhere as it was in the past. It would be worth your while perhaps looking at the equipment they are issued as they go to theatre to see everything from their underclothes through to ballistic glasses and everything else just to see what they get by way of equipment. I think you would be surprised.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** They are all very pleased with it.

**Q103 Geraldine Smith:** I am glad that has improved because at one time they were not very pleased.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** That is correct. We have put that behind us. The body armour is best of type, helmets, personal equipment, the eye protection, hearing protection, and we do a lot of work with the medical services on food, nutrition, all that advice, and we are doing a lot of work to try and reduce the weight of batteries, which is a factor that the Report brings out.

*The Committee suspended from 5.30pm to 5.10pm for a division in the House.*

**Q104 Geraldine Smith:** Can I ask, whilst you have made a significant number of improvements I understand that you are still breaching targets for the length of time that individual soldiers are away from their families. When are you going to stop this? I think this is serious to the welfare of those people and also their families.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** First of all, the so-called Harmony Guidelines, which are the targets you refer to, are just that, they are guidelines, they are what we regard as being the desirable spaces between deployments both for units and for individuals. Over the period that we have just been through with two medium-sized operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, almost inevitably the fact is we have not consistently met these guidelines. Taking the Army as the example, something like 10% of our people have been deployed more frequently than the guidelines assume. We want to observe them and I think there is a good chance with the drawdown from Iraq that we will get significantly closer to doing so, but, as emerged from the earlier questions, there are, in particular, some specialist trades where—

**Q105 Geraldine Smith:** Can I just come in there. The problem is that if you continue to breach those targets, and they are what you think are reasonable and acceptable, then you are going to have significant problems with recruitment. It is hard enough at the moment that people are joining and they have been to Iraq, they are going to

Afghanistan, if they are not going to get back to see their families and are being used because there is no one else to do the job you are going to have significant problems.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** First of all, the great majority are operating within the Harmony Guidelines. It is the minority who we end up deploying more frequently and earlier than we would wish. As a matter of fact, on recruitment we are currently doing very well and are moving steadily towards full strength in all three Services. That may reflect economic conditions, but it is also the case that our wastage out of all three Services has reduced significantly. If you meet, as you will if you visit theatre, those of our people who are deployed, of course it is challenging but many of them are enthusiastic because that is what they joined for and they enjoy their work.

**Q106 Geraldine Smith:** Finally, can I just ask about your welfare packages to support the troops whilst they are there and also the families back home.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** The welfare package as defined in the Report we have managed to install pretty successfully. There are issues of the kind that came up earlier in the hearing about satellite phones in Forward Operating Bases and we are now concentrating on rolling out the welfare package, the access to the Internet, et cetera, to these more exposed places. Picking up on the earlier discussion, I have to say these are very remote and inhospitable places and I do not think in any previous conflict our deployed people would have expected to have contact with home routinely.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** When I visit them they understand that context point the PUS makes. We are doing a lot to be very innovative here in the way that we provide a text service if we cannot provide wi-fi and so on. We do keep these things not just under constant review, but also we are very quickly moving facilities and support elements that were in Iraq, where we can, to Afghanistan. As General Dick observed earlier, the soldiers do not complain about it, they understand the context they are in. We do our best to meet their needs and they are content that we do our best. There is a lot of support that goes on from access to DVDs through to access to telephone links to home.

**Q107 Mr Mitchell:** I was wondering why people who deploy as individuals, I assume as replacements, get less adequate training than if they deploy as a unit. I think you have got an increasing number of people deploying as replacements. I ask the question because I was reading Anthony Beever's book on D-Day and he says that the ones who came in as replacements were the first to be killed and the least prepared for the kind of battle conditions at Normandy. Presumably that is the case in Afghanistan too, is it not?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** We certainly accept that the training as reported in the Report for those who deploy as individuals was less than it should be and, as emerged earlier in the session, we have been taking steps to address that.

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**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** Formed unit replacements are from the formed unit back here who have done the training, so when we are talking about infantry units it is not the case that somebody with a few days' training will suddenly deploy into the frontline, that is not the case.

**Q108 Mr Mitchell:** Why has the proportion of those deployed as individuals increased?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** Partly because of specialist capabilities which have been required. A lot of the people we are talking about in this category are, indeed, specialists ranging from intelligence to equipment support or medical, as we discussed earlier in answer to previous questions. That would be the majority of those. Then we have a unit structure deployed as either battalions or regiments depending on their background.

**Q109 Mr Mitchell:** Geraldine asked about 90 kilos of equipment and that is an unbearable load, I would have thought, with body armour and all the rest of it. I see there is a little note in 4.24 that says at the end: "The Department is investigating whether lighter equipment can be developed". If I was carrying 90 kilos around I would think it is bloody well time too. Is this a leisurely investigation or is it a matter of urgency?

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** I think the Report underestimates the urgency with which we are approaching this. To take the particular example that was given earlier of batteries, my brief tells me that we expect to have lighter versions introduced later this year. It is also the case, as some of the earlier questioning revealed, that although it may still be heavier than we would wish because there are so many things that one expects a deployed soldier to carry these days, the trend has been towards lighter equipment and the new kit is significantly lighter than its predecessor.

**Q110 Mr Mitchell:** Why do they have to lug so much in any case? You are defending against a bunch of bearded men on horseback, presumably, and we are tramping around with 90 kilos of equipment, which is ludicrous.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** I think 90 kilos is rare. Of course, the way that we operate at patrol level is very variable. The heavy things are obviously weapons, ammunition, water and batteries, and we have covered most of those issues. I would not want the Committee to think that 90 kilos is the norm.

**Mr Mitchell:** You are going to be like a long-term tortoise.

**Q111 Chairman:** The Committee has made its point on this. I want to ask you about this. You are quite a light chap, Sir Bill, but, General, you would not like to be carrying Sir Bill around every day, would you? Perhaps you feel you do carry Sir Bill!

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** Indeed. There are quite a few people I would not like to carry.

**Q112 Chairman:** You are a soldier and there must be risks if you are dealing in a very fast moving environment.

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** I have had to carry it myself and it is not the sort of thing you want to do for any time. What are we doing? We are urgently trying to reduce the weight. We have talked about body armour and other elements like that, reducing the weight of weaponry. Because they take a little bit of time, as I was explaining earlier on, in the interim we have purchased a large range of smaller vehicles that can go with the soldiers to carry things like spare batteries, spare water and can also be used for medical evacuation. I think that is a really sensible short-term solution until we can get into the business of taking weight out from soldiers. I would also say that we do make most of our equipment modular, so it is up to the commander at the time and if he wants to accept, for example, a lower level of protection they can remove the plates from their body armour. It really depends upon what threat level they are facing. Rest assured, I am very well aware of the dangers of carrying anybody around, even you, Chairman.

**Q113 Chairman:** We will put it in our report as well just to encourage your efforts. Also, Geraldine Smith asked about leave and the rest and that is very important. Richard Bacon has a question, he cannot be here, and he wanted me to ask this: what is the MoD doing to compensate Service personnel who lose their leave waiting for flights from Afghanistan or other overseas deployments back to the UK? The problem is if planes have been delayed, and of course it ties in with our Report, because they have got spare parts missing or whatever, the soldier is waiting in Afghanistan but his leave has officially started and he is just waiting on the tarmac. What do you do to compensate him? Richard Bacon also wants to know why does the MoD not regard disembarkation into the UK as the starting point for mid-tour and end of tour leave? This seems to be a very sensible question to me.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** First of all, delays on the air bridge are much less frequent than they were and the timeliness figures have improved even since this Report. What cannot happen in a very disciplined environment is for the leave just to be extended beyond the point where the person is expected to have returned. What we do in these circumstances I look to CJO to say something.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** What we do, Chairman, is we manage it very sensibly. Everybody involved in the air bridge is aware if a flight is an R&R flight, a relief flight, everybody knows that, and then there is flexibility. As the Report also brings out, one of the techniques we use is to use the air bridge a certain part of the way and then pick up a charter aeroplane, ones the Committee would all recognise, for the remainder of the flight and then that flight will go as close as is possible to the destination of the unit. Again, obviously with individuals and individual reinforcements that is harder to achieve. I can absolutely assure you that the movement staff are very flexible in this area now. Of course, we cannot guarantee the timing of the flight from theatre, which is the military aeroplane with all the protection, but I can absolutely assure

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the Committee that there is flexibility built in to make sure that onward move accommodates any delay and then the flight destination is as close as it can be to where it needs to go.

**Q114 Chairman:** Obviously the fact that Mr Bacon has asked these questions means there is an issue.

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** It was an issue I would say.

**Q115 Chairman:** You cannot tell us in the last six months how much leave has been lost from our troops in Afghanistan? You do not do an estimate of this, do you?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** No, I cannot tell you. Again, we can provide you with a note.<sup>8</sup>

**Q116 Chairman:** Anyway, you feel that you are trying to address that. Also, Air Marshal, this is quite topical because we have got a great increase in the American presence in Helmand Province and an increase in helicopter cover as well. Is this enabling you to do more operations now?

**Air Marshal Sir Stuart Peach:** The operations of the force are complementary and, indeed, are part of the NATO campaign I outlined earlier. The American reinforcements we welcome, of course, and they enable us to thicken the effect we are achieving. The operations are ongoing, as you know, and the US Marine Corps have deployed and are embarked upon their first operation which only began last week. As we look forward as the US force beds down then we will look forward to planning more complementary operations with them under NATO command.

**Q117 Chairman:** General, the last question for you arises from Alan Williams' questions about the Vector vehicle. Obviously the threats have changed, we know, that is what you said, but should you not have spotted the low reliability before it was deployed?

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** This is the Vector you are talking about?

**Q118 Chairman:** Yes.

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** Vector was used in a way that we did not expect it to be used, to be frank.

**Q119 Chairman:** If you had done more trialling perhaps that would have helped.

**Lieutenant General Applegate:** I pointed out earlier on that generally we attempt to do more of our trialling and experimentation in theatre because that is representative. Where possible, if we have time, we will do that trialling and experimentation in the UK, but it was an urgent need. I go back, it was an urgent operational requirement and the desire from theatre was for a vehicle of this type and that was the best vehicle of the type available so we deployed it. It has not met our expectations and, as I said to you earlier on, we will therefore limit its use.

**Q120 Chairman:** On John Pugh's questions, you understand that you are doing a note now for us, Sir Bill, because you were a bit vague in your answers about the total costs of various aspects of this campaign in Afghanistan.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** We will certainly provide a note.

**Q121 Chairman:** We want that done quite urgently for us. We are not getting involved in the policy of whether we should be there or not but we are a value for money Committee so we want to know the costs of all these aspects.

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** We will certainly provide a note on the costs and the various calls on the reserve.<sup>9</sup>

**Q122 Chairman:** I would like to know also, and I think this is in the public domain, the year that we bought up the poppy crop early on in this campaign, what did that cost as a comparator?<sup>10</sup>

**Sir Bill Jeffrey:** We will try to find that figure. What I would be less sanguine about is our ability to get anywhere near answering Dr Pugh's interesting question about the cost per yard because I do not think it is quite like that.

**Chairman:** That concludes our hearing, gentlemen. It has been a very important and interesting hearing. Obviously we have to make sure that our troops have the very best and we rely on your efforts. Thank you very much.

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<sup>8</sup> Ev 22

<sup>9</sup> Ev 22

<sup>10</sup> Ev22

### Letter from John Hutton, Secretary of State for Defence

#### DRAWDOWN IN IRAQ: GIFTING

I am writing to give you more background information on a Departmental Minute which I plan to submit to the House regarding gifting related to the drawdown of military activities in Iraq.

The gift concerns the permanent protected structures erected in Iraq during 2008, which will no longer be required by UK forces post UK drawdown. HM Treasury are content with my Department's proposals.

During 2007, UK forces were subjected to high levels of Indirect Fire (IDF) into the Contingency Operating Base (COB) in Basra, Iraq. UK personnel were living and working in close proximity in areas vulnerable to rocket attack and the intelligence and risk assessments at the time were that there was a high risk of a mass casualty situation. In response to these assessments, the most vulnerable areas were assessed as the dining facilities, accommodation areas and the field hospital.

In June 2007, a business case was submitted to HM Treasury, and approved, for four permanent protected dining facilities (DFACs) at a cost of £45.399 million. A second case was submitted for three accommodation units and a hospital. During 2008 the four DFACs were completed and in use and the accommodation units and hospital were in process of being built.

Following the drawdown of UK forces in Iraq, the permanent protected structures will no longer be required for use by the UK. The buildings sit on Iraqi soil and cannot be sold or moved. As they are of no further use to the UK we would not wish to remain responsible for them. This has resulted in only one feasible course of action, namely for the four DFACs to be passed to the US for their use as they move into the COB to continue the coalition mission.

Both the UK and US Government's separate agreements with the Government of Iraq, which were signed in Dec 2008, contain a clause which passes all fixed infrastructure to the Government of Iraq on the departure of UK or US forces. Therefore, although the initial gifting proposal is to the US, these buildings will ultimately pass to the Government of Iraq.

Because the buildings are on Iraqi soil and cannot be sold, Defence Estates and the Disposal Services Authority have advised they have no material value to the UK and have provided a nominal valuation of £1. The value of the buildings will therefore be written down in the Department's accounts to this figure. Immoveable fixtures and fittings in the buildings have been valued at £456,885. The Departmental Minute therefore proposes a gift to the US totalling £456,886 made up of the nominal valuation of the buildings and the value of the fixtures and fittings. It is recognised however that the full impairment to the department is £45.856 million, which is the cost of construction plus the cost of fixtures and fittings.

The accommodation units and hospital buildings were not completed and, when it became clear that the buildings would no longer be required by UK forces, we decided not to fit the buildings out. As a result, and on HM Treasury advice, we will be treating the loss incurred as a constructive loss of £50.620 million in the MOD accounts.

The combined value, therefore, of all buildings and contents handed over, initially to the US Armed Forces, is £96.476 million—comprising £45.399 million (hardened structures gifted, impaired to £1), £0.457 million (the gifted contents) plus £50.620 million (the constructive loss on the incomplete structures).

The NAO have been made aware of this information for the purposes of their audit.

6 May 2009

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#### DEPARTMENTAL MINUTE DATED 8 MAY 2009 REGARDING THE GIFT OF UK PERMANENT STRUCTURES WITHIN SOUTH EAST IRAQ TO THE US ARMED FORCES

It is the normal practice, when a Government department proposes to make a gift of a value exceeding £250,000, for the department concerned to present to the House of Commons a Minute giving particulars of the gift and explaining the circumstances; and to refrain from making the gift until 14 Parliamentary sitting days after the issue of the Minute, except in cases of special urgency.

The gift in question is to the US Armed Forces and consists of four permanent protected structures currently used as UK dining facilities located within the Contingency Operating Base (COB), Basra. The COB has been occupied by the UK Armed Forces since May 2003 as part of Operation TELIC. The UK's planned transition within Iraq will see our Armed Forces, during the early part of 2009, hand over responsibility for the military operation within Multi-National Division (South East) to the US. In order to enable this transition the UK Armed Forces will be required to vacate the COB to allow a US Brigade Unit under the command of HQ 10th Mountain Division to infill.

In accordance with Departmental Gifting policy, the MOD Disposal Services Authority (DSA) and Defence Estate Land Agent (DLA) have provided asset valuations. DSA have valued the contents (non-fixed assets) of all four permanent dining facilities at £456,885. The contents comprise sinks, walk-in refrigeration units, food preparation areas, catering equipment and furnishings. The permanent structures have been given a zero value by the DLA as they sit on Iraqi soil and cannot be sold on the open market. UK investment over financial years 2007–08, 2008–09 is £45.399 million, which through impairment (a technical write down in value) is reduced to a nominal sum of £1. The US intention is to use the four permanent structures as dining facilities, although should this change the MOD will instruct DSA to sell the removable contents from each. The structures and their contents will eventually transfer to Iraq when the US Armed Forces no longer have a use for them. In total, the gift is worth £456,886.

Although not a gift, an additional four incomplete structures have been handed over to the US Armed Forces, which will eventually transfer to Iraqi control. The total value of these structures was £50.620 million, which has been treated as a constructive loss. The combined value, therefore, of all buildings and contents is £96.476 million—£45.399 million (hardened structures gifted, impaired to £1), £0.457 million (the gifted contents) plus £50.620 million (the constructive loss on the incomplete structures).

The Treasury has approved the proposal in principle. If, during the period of 14 parliamentary sitting days beginning on the date on which this Minute was laid before the House of Commons, a Member signifies an objection by giving notice of a Parliamentary Question or of a Motion relating to the Minute, or by otherwise raising the matter in the House, final approval of the gift will be withheld pending an examination of the objection.

Ministry of Defence

8 May 2009

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### Supplementary memorandum from the Ministry of Defence

Questions 23–24 (Mr Curry): *on fire prevention devices on operational aircraft*

The Department is committed to ensuring that all passenger-carrying aircraft flying into operational threat areas will be fitted with a Fuel Tank Inerting (FTI) system as soon as is practicable. One such system is Explosion Suppressant Foam. A great deal of work has already been undertaken in this respect. All Hercules C130J aircraft are now fitted with Explosion Suppressant Foam (ESF), as are the majority of the C130K fleet. Those Hercules C-130K aircraft that have not been fitted with ESF are in the process of being retired from service and will not be deployed in theatre.

The A400M is planned to replace the C-130K fleet and operate in similar threat environments to that currently experienced by the C-130K. Our intention is to fit the A400M fleet with a Portable Removable On-Board Inert Gas Generating System (PROBIGGS)—another form of FTI. The one exception is an early development aircraft, already under construction, that cannot be fitted with the necessary pipework. A retrofit to this aircraft in order to introduce PROBIGGS may be possible in due course, but if this is not possible, the aircraft would be used only in benign environments. Our C-17s, the other major airlift asset, are all fitted with an FTI system—On-Board Inert Gas Generating System.

We have firm plans to fit FTI on a number of other air transport assets and we are continuing to review the requirement to fit other fleets. It is important to note, however, that some of our aircraft, particularly fast jets, would be rendered far less capable if FTI were to be fitted. These aircraft have very limited fuel tank capacity and it is our judgement that retro-fitting FTI would significantly impair their performance.

Question 31 (Mr Touhig): *on medical reservists making up the majority of the hospital-based medical personnel in Afghanistan in 2007*

The reserve/regular ratio working in the field hospital varies significantly over time. For example, the UK military medical personnel working in the Role 3 Field Hospital at Camp Bastion during HERRICK 10a (April to July 2009) consisted of, typically, 59 reserves and 121 regulars. For the forthcoming HERRICK 10b (July to October 2009), the number of UK personnel deployed will consist of 10 reserves and 56 regulars—the UK personnel will be working alongside 98 Danish Field Hospital personnel who are deploying for that three month period.

From April 2010 it is planned to have alternate six month regular and reserve tours. This begins with the regulars going on Herrick 12 (April to October 2010) where it is anticipated that there will only be a small number of accompanying reserve medics, approximately 10 individuals. When a reserve field hospital unit is due to provide cover, it is accepted that they will generally be unable to fill all hospital posts, but will do their best from the number of volunteers; they will fill between 40–70% of the posts with the rest being filled with regulars.

Question 64–65 (Dr Pugh): *in terms of supplies for operation in Afghanistan, what is the percentage figure of how much is resourced or provided locally, how much is provided regionally and how much comes from the UK*

The Ministry of Defence is committed to procuring as many resources as possible locally within Afghanistan because this both reduces the logistics burden in transporting items to theatre and helps to build the local and regional economy. In particular, we currently procure the majority of the basic construction materials within Afghanistan including 100% of aggregate and raw timber. We continue to look for opportunities to source supplies locally although this is limited by what can be purchased in Afghanistan and, in some cases, potential security concerns. In addition we directly employ 679 Locally Employed Civilians in a range of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled tasks: our contractors are also large employers of Afghans.

Questions 65–66 (Dr Pugh): *on fatality and casualty rates per 1,000 personnel*

Comparable data for numbers wounded in action as a proportion of those deployed are only available for roulements 6–9, which cover the period 15 April 2007 to 14 April 2009. Roulement 6 is the first for which reliable validated data is available; the UK field hospital was established in Afghanistan in May 2006. Inconsistencies in the initial data collection means that validation of data for Roulement 5 has proved too complex. The table below therefore shows the fatality and wounded in action rates per 1,000 UK military

personnel deployed on Op HERRICK between 15 April 2007 and 14 April 2009. The fatality rates are based on deaths caused by hostile action. The casualty rates are based on the number of patients processed through the Emergency Department of the UK operational field hospital.

These figures are based on the official endorsed troop levels per roulement, ie the total number of troops deployed at the start of each roulement. Actual numbers of personnel in theatre fluctuates on a daily basis for a variety of reasons, including mid-tour rest and recuperation, temporary absence for training, evacuation for medical reasons, the roulement of forces, visits and other factors.

**UK MILITARY PERSONNEL ON OP HERRICK 6–9, FATALITY AND CASUALTY  
RATES PER 1,000 PERSONNEL**

	<i>Operation Roulement</i>			
	<i>HERRICK 6</i> <i>15 April 2007 to</i> <i>14 October 2007</i>	<i>HERRICK 7</i> <i>15 October 2007</i> <i>to 14 April 2008</i>	<i>HERRICK 8</i> <i>15 April 2008 to</i> <i>14 October 2008</i>	<i>HERRICK 9</i> <i>15 October 2008</i> <i>to 14 April 2009</i>
Fatality rates	4.29	1.62	3.51	3.95
Casualty rates	25.74	12.39	21.17	18.40

Questions 94–96 (Mr Burstow): *on dealing with mental health issues arising from deployment*

It is our policy that mental health issues should be properly recognised and appropriately handled and that every effort should be made to reduce the stigma associated with them. We consider all mental health disorders seriously, and offer assessment and treatment to individuals who might be concerned about their mental health. Diagnosis and treatment in the Armed Forces is performed by fully trained and accredited mental health personnel.

There is a clear pre- and post-operational stress management policy in place across all services. No system can guarantee to detect every individual at risk of mental disorder. Nevertheless, measures are in place to increase awareness at all levels. These include pre- and post-deployment briefing and the availability of support, assessment and (if required) treatment, both during and after deployments. This is available to all personnel, whether Regular or mobilised Reservists. Our medical officers and nurses are also trained to recognise the signs of mental disorder.

We recognise that operational deployments can be stressful experiences, so we look to offer individuals briefing prior to returning to their home. Returning individuals, whether in a formed unit or as an individual augmentee, are shown the “homecoming” DVD. This includes a psychiatrist giving advice on the normal symptoms an individual might expect on returning from a traumatic operational zone, helpful strategies to aid readjustment and details of where to seek help. The DVD specifically mentions stigma and encourages helpseeking.

Where practicable, and this is in the main for formed units, we arrange for Service personnel (both Regulars and Reservists) returning from active service in Afghanistan (and previously in Iraq) to have a decompression period. This is aimed at facilitating the adjustment from the operational to the UK environment where they can begin to unwind mentally and physically while having time to talk to colleagues and superiors—with whom they have deployed—about their experiences. In the main, decompression either takes place in Cyprus (if the troops are returning to permanent bases in the UK or Germany); or at the Al-Udeid base in Qatar (if returning to permanent bases in Cyprus). Individual augmentees with a formed unit at pre-deployment, deployment and on return to UK, would normally be treated as above. Individual augmentees who are not part of a formed unit are covered by single Service arrangements. RN and Army individuals would, before or after post operational tour leave (POTL), attend a ½ day reintegration package which would consist of a mental health briefing. The RAF also have a ½–1 day package following POTL which may include a mental health brief.

The average length of time spent in decompression on Cyprus by troops returning from Afghanistan is 24 hours. We believe this duration strikes the right balance between giving our people the opportunity to wind down at the end of an arduous operational tour whilst also meeting their very understandable desire to be reunited with friends and family as quickly as possible after a lengthy period away from home.

Further work, which involves all three Services, covers prevention, screening, reporting, data collection, training, and education. Multidisciplinary Service and civilian groups have been set up to promote good practice and mental wellbeing across the Armed Forces.

Trauma Risk Management (TRiM) is a model of peer group mentoring and support for use in the aftermath of traumatic events; it is not a medical treatment. TRiM has been formally accepted and is being implemented by the three Services and is increasingly being used within the operational environment.

It aims to empower non-medical staff to spot those who might have been affected by traumatic events in order that their peers and leaders can provide them with appropriate support or, where it is required, to refer them for specialist help. As TRiM is primarily a unit led innovation it is hoped that it will go some way to reduce the stigma associated with mental health problems. The training has had the additional impact of

contributing to an increased awareness of the importance of nurturing the mental welfare of the deployed population. It is currently being used, with wide support from those involved, in Afghanistan (and previously in Iraq).

Questions 113–115 (Chairman): *what is the MOD doing to compensate Service personnel who lose their leave waiting for flights from Afghanistan*

The passenger Airbridge moves large numbers of personnel into sometimes hostile environments and under difficult conditions. Every effort is made to minimise delays but, given the conditions and scale of the operation, some delays are inevitable. We do not centrally hold information on the reason for delays encountered by individual travellers or the purpose of their travel. Information on how much leave has been lost could therefore only be provided at disproportionate cost.

We recognise the importance of Rest and Recuperation in sustaining the operational capability of our Servicemen and women and accept that delays when they occur are frustrating, particularly where personnel lose out on time at home. When Service personnel are absent from theatre their duties have to be taken over by others. Guaranteeing a fixed period of leave at home, irrespective of delays in transit, would be impractical and have an adverse operational impact. We are, however, looking at the alternative option of extending post operational tour leave by way of compensation for those who lose out on Rest and Recuperation as a result of travel delays.

14 August 2009

#### Further supplementary memorandum from the Ministry of Defence

Questions 56–62 (Dr Pugh): *on total annual cost of the operation in Afghanistan for the last financial year*

We claim only the net additional costs we have incurred on operations from the Reserve. Costs that we would have incurred regardless of the operation taking place—such as wages and salaries—are not included. Savings on activities that have not occurred because of the operation—training exercises for example—are taken into account in arriving at the net figures.

We do not break down the costs incurred from the Reserve on operations in the manner suggested. The total net audited costs for Afghanistan for 2008–09 can be broken down as follows:

#### Cost of operations in Afghanistan:

2008–09—FINAL OUTTURN

<i>(£m)</i>	<i>2008–09 Outturn</i>
Civilian Personnel	15
Military Personnel	73
Stock/Other Consumption	527
Infrastructure Costs	162
Equipment Support Costs	384
Other Costs and Services	312
Income Foregone/Generated (-)	-24
<b>Total Direct Resource DEL</b>	<b>1,449</b>
Indirect Resource DEL	207
<b>Total Resource DEL</b>	<b>1,656</b>
Capital Additions	967
<b>Total Capital DEL</b>	<b>967</b>
<b>Total DEL</b>	<b>2,623</b>

Question 122 (Chairman): *on the cost of buying up the poppy crop early in the campaign*

In 2002, the Afghan Transitional Authority agreed to a one-off compensation scheme for farmers who eradicated their opium crops. To support the scheme, the UK provided financial assistance worth £21.25 million.

5 October 2009