

WEDNESDAY 30 NOVEMBER 2005

---

Present

Armstrong of Ilminster, L  
Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury, B  
Fowler, L (Chairman)  
Gibson of Market Rasen, B  
Holme of Cheltenham, L  
Howe of Idlicote, B  
Kalms, L  
King of Bridgwater, L  
Maxton, L  
Peston, L

---

Witnesses: **Mr Mostefa Souag**, Editor-in-Chief, UK Bureau, Al-Jazeera;  
**Mr Mohammed Chebarro**, London Bureau Chief, Middle East Broadcasting Centre; and  
**Mr Ian Richardson**, Former Managing-Editor, BBC Arabic Television News; examined.

**Q924 Chairman:** Good morning. Thank you very much for coming. I think you will know the history of the Select Committee. We have produced one Report but there were a number of other areas which we did not think we had sufficient time to do in that first Report and we are coming back to them. One of the areas we are very interested in is the BBC World Service and obviously its intention to launch an Arabic-language television service and we thought, with your collective experience, you may be able to help us in this particular area. Obviously we are talking essentially about the BBC and policy as far as that is concerned. Could I start perhaps with you, Mr Richardson; in a sense, we have been here before, have we not? You had your own Arabic Television News in the 1990s. Tell us about that and why it failed?

**Mr Richardson:** I was involved in it from the beginning. I started it up as the Project Manager along with the engineering people and then ran it and then closed it down. It is difficult to know exactly why it went wrong but, from my point of view, it was because there

were irreconcilable differences over editorial issues with Saudi and with Orbit, which is owned by the Saudis, and it went from bad to terrible and eventually they just closed us down without warning.

**Q925 Chairman:** When you say “they” closed you down, who closed you down?

**Mr Richardson:** Orbit.

**Q926 Chairman:** Just explain to us the Orbit connection, how that actually came about; this was not strictly BBC going out there by itself?

**Mr Richardson:** No. It was a satellite cluster, I think was then the vogue phrase, with all sorts of different channels and one of the channels that they were promoting the most was the BBC channel and it was a commercial arrangement between Orbit and BBC Worldwide. I was removed from that, in a sense, because I was looking after the editorial side, the newsroom, and that sort of thing, but not the financial side, so it was a commercial operation.

**Q927 Chairman:** On the editorial side, did you have total independence?

**Mr Richardson:** Yes.

**Q928 Chairman:** What about total resource, how many resources did you have?

**Mr Richardson:** For what we did it was quite reasonable. We were independent but we had a tremendous amount of interference and it just went on and on and on.

**Q929 Chairman:** Just explain to us, how did that interference come about?

**Mr Richardson:** In theory, what was supposed to happen was that all editorial issues that were in dispute should have been dealt with between Orbit’s management and BBC Worldwide and they were to act as the buffer between Orbit and the newsroom. To an extent that did work but it was not long before we really started to feel the heat. I think the first real

clash we had was when we broadcast a programme in which we spoke about King Fahd's illness and speculated about the succession and word was passed down to me that we were very lucky we were not taken off air because we had broken a very serious taboo, in that we had suggested the King might die and it was very improper that we should have discussed who might succeed him.

**Q930 Chairman:** Looking at the position now, what would you say if you were starting a new service in 2005-06, would there be the same restraints, would you get into the same problems? As you know, the BBC are starting their service; given your experience in the nineties, tell us what you think are the prospects for that service?

**Mr Richardson:** For its editorial independence it will be much easier. They will still come under pressure but that is the way of the world. The difference this time is that there will be no financial interest. You will not have someone ringing up and saying, "Look, if you do that again we're just going to have to pull the plug on you," and in that sense they will have a great deal more editorial freedom.

**Q931 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** Do you think the BBC understand fully how difficult it is to run a TV channel, they have got experience, obviously, of running radio channels in this part of the world, but how difficult it is to run a TV channel in the areas they now want to cover?

**Mr Richardson:** I am not sure they understand, or that everyone understands, how difficult it is to run a foreign-language channel and I have already gone into print saying that I have great reservations about this new project, because I think it is seriously underfunded. Without me getting too technical, my experience is that you cannot compare an English television rolling news channel, an international one, like BBC World, with BBC Arabic, because it is about at least a third more expensive because of all the translation that is involved. Most world

material that comes in for a news channel is in English and therefore it has to be translated. If I may give you just one example, we used to run *Panorama*, which got us into serious trouble by running it, but we could not put out *Panorama* under two days after it went out on BBC One or BBC Two simply because of all the translation involved, the checking of the translation, the revoicing, the production, that is everything. In a sense, I am not sure that everyone does understand how difficult it is.

**Q932 Lord King of Bridgwater:** I thought another criticism of concern which led to the closure of the service was that it was a London-based service with Arabic speakers who were not actually really identified with the region. Is it your understanding that the new service is going to be the same; (a) is that a correct criticism the first time round and (b) will it be different next time, do you think?

**Mr Richardson:** I do not think it is a correct criticism because it is not something that I ever heard about. We are accused of many things, like being a petro-dollar channel, because of the Saudi connection, but, in a sense, being removed to London, the news was coming out from an area where there were not any obvious conflicts. If it had come from Egypt, for instance, everyone would have said, "No, it's the Egyptian point of view." If it had come from Saudi Arabia, the same sort of criticism would have been made. I think the BBC had such a good reputation that some of the early reservations were swept away.

**Q933 Lord King of Bridgwater:** You see it being BBC correspondents who are in the region now, who are broadcasting in English, being translated into Arabic and repeated back in Arabic?

**Mr Richardson:** That will be the case, I assume, but I am sure they will be trying to set up their own network of correspondents speaking Arabic, but it is very expensive and that is where I differ with people about the cost of this project.

**Q934 Lord Armstrong of Ilminster:** You said that the arrangement in which you were involved always had the financial clout, you could pull the plug if you did not like something; that will not be true of the new BBC service. If the authorities were to dislike what the BBC new service was putting out, would they have sanctions which they could apply to it, to try to censor it, as it were?

**Mr Richardson:** I am no expert on that. They can always apply sanctions of some sort but certainly they would not be able to switch us off, like Orbit did. It varies from country to country. The Chinese have been quite effective at keeping a lot of the BBC's coverage away from the populous.

**Q935 Baroness Gibson of Market Rasen:** Following on this topic, Nigel Chapman has said, in a speech that he made in October, that "We" that is the BBC "...must have a strong presence in the Middle East itself." From what you are saying, do you think that it will be difficult for the BBC (a) to recruit high-quality Arabic-speaking staff and (b) that actually they will be from the region itself? Do you think that will create a difficulty for the BBC, bearing in mind the amount of money that they are putting forward?

**Mr Richardson:** I have wondered about that myself and I have asked a few people, with whom I was connected the previous time round, what their reaction would be to coming back to London to work for the BBC. There was a tremendous amount of damage done to the BBC's reputation among journalists and broadcasters because they regarded the BBC as a kind of god and they could not believe it when a great many of them had moved over here and suddenly found that they were out of a job at an hour's notice, almost. While the BBC did make some reasonable settlement deals, there was that damage. Since then, of course, you have got Al-Jazeera, you have got Al-Arabiya, you have got Dubai Television, it is everywhere. Honestly, I do not know whether the BBC is still going to be an attraction,

although I would imagine that Al-Jazeera will not take lightly to a great number of defections, and there might well be a salary competition.

**Q936 Chairman:** You are assuming that this operation is going to be headquartered in London, are you?

**Mr Richardson:** I believe it is, yes, with bureaus abroad, but I do not know how many bureaus.

**Q937 Chairman:** Thank you, Mr Richardson. Can we move on perhaps to Al-Jazeera. Could you tell us first the history; how did Al-Jazeera come to be formed?

**Mr Souag:** Al-Jazeera started in 1996, exactly around the time when BBC Arabic Television was closing down, and found it really very useful to get all the expertise that the BBC had prepared. Actually, even before the BBC Television was planning to close down, Al-Jazeera was trying to hunt for good heads from the BBC, and some people were talking about moving to this new channel in Qatar. A lot of people were wondering why you would move to Arabic Television in a place like Qatar and The Gulf, where there was no freedom of expression, there was no tradition of providing serious television coverage, etc. I was with the BBC, Ian was my boss and I am very glad to be with him today. We were told that this was going to be actually a different kind of television, that the Government of Qatar was going to sponsor the station, at least for several years until the station could get its own money, but with no interference, with complete independence. That was because, even before the station was created, the Government had started liberating the media a little bit. They cancelled the Ministry of Information, for example, which used to censor everything there. They started some kind of liberation of the media. When the BBC closed down, of course, everybody was looking for a job. Some of us went to Qatar and to Doha to work for Vizier, some of us went to other places, including NBC, which used to be here in London, the Arabic television

channel that was here in London, it was quite famous and had a good reputation in the Middle East, at least, not necessarily for the same kinds of reasons but still it had quite a good audience.

**Q938 Chairman:** Just to cut through a bit, would you say that actually the closure of the BBC service was instrumental in Al-Jazeera forming, or it was just a vast help?

**Mr Souag:** I think I would say it was a big help, because Al-Jazeera was already planned and was founded actually before the BBC closed down, but certainly without the staff that left the BBC for Al-Jazeera I do not think Al-Jazeera would have been the same success that it is now and I do not think the people who created Al-Jazeera were expecting it to be what it is now.

**Q939 Chairman:** When Al-Jazeera took some of the staff from the BBC did it also take the values of the BBC, in the sense of objective and balanced reporting? Is that the aim of your channel?

**Mr Souag:** I think that is exactly the aim of our channel and that is what we found in the code of honour for Al-Jazeera, all the principles on which the BBC and some other media institutions work.

**Q940 Chairman:** You model yourself on the BBC, do you think?

**Mr Souag:** I think so. From my own experience in the BBC, we had the independence that we were hoping for, as Arab journalists, we were looking for the freedom really to do the job that, as professionals, we like to do, we found it there. My experience with Al-Jazeera, which is about four years, I did not start with Al-Jazeera from the beginning, is there is practically more freedom and independence than the BBC itself.

**Q941 Chairman:** You do not regard yourself as an instrument of propaganda?

**Mr Souag:** Absolutely not; actually it is exactly the opposite.

**Q942 Chairman:** Why do so many people disagree with you and feel so strongly about Al-Jazeera, including the President of the United States, we gather?

**Mr Souag:** I hope he only disagrees and it stops there and does not go beyond that. The point is that up till 2001 and even the beginning of 2002 Al-Jazeera was hailed as a beacon of freedom of speech, of promoting freedom of the media and democracy and all these things in the Middle East by the Americans. It was mentioned even in some official speeches, here in England, in the West, in general. The people we had a problem with were not the western governments or the western media, whatever, we had problems with Middle Eastern governments, with the Saudis, the Egyptians, the Tunisians, etc., our offices were closed and some places would not allow Al-Jazeera to operate.

**Q943 Chairman:** Rather like Mr Richardson, in a different way?

**Mr Souag:** Yes, exactly, in a different way. We had almost the same kinds of pressures, but Al-Jazeera could support itself financially if the Saudis, for example, did not prevent all the companies that have any connection to the Saudis advertising on Al-Jazeera. We have big millions and millions of possible sources cut from us just because of that. The problem was with the Middle Eastern governments and that is because of the freedom that Al-Jazeera provided as a platform for political discussion, with the opposition as well as government people. After what happened on 9/11 in particular, then in Afghanistan and Iraq, etc., Al-Jazeera continued the same line, there has been no change whatsoever, in its editorial stance, they were still reporting the same thing: facts. Unfortunately, the Americans, and maybe some other western governments, did not like that, they wanted things to be hidden and Al-Jazeera was not going to obey that kind of line, and therefore we got into this problem. When you hear the President of the United States or the Secretary of Defense, or whatever, saying that Al-Jazeera is provocative, is this and that, of course a lot of people follow the

same model without even understanding what is going on in Al-Jazeera, without even watching Al-Jazeera.

**Q944 Chairman:** Do you not have an editorial policy of any kind on, say, the coverage of Iraq?

**Mr Souag:** We have an editorial policy. I am sure that it is the same editorial policy that you will find in the BBC, or whatever. I think we are a little bit more independent than the BBC. Personally, I have noticed lately, in the last year or so, that the BBC is not reporting everything that should be reported. Al-Jazeera, for example, was reporting from Fallujah when it was being bombed by the Americans, and it happened that our reporter was inside and we were reporting from the inside and the Americans were very angry specifically about that particular thing. Most of the BBC people cannot actually go out and report, I understand, it is a very difficult situation, or if you go out and you go with the military, or guarded, embedded, you are not going to report really what is going on, you are going to be one-sided, in one way or another. I am not saying that the BBC does not want to report what is going on there, it is just that there are limitations. I think Al-Jazeera was doing a better job and that is the reason why Al-Jazeera's offices were closed in Iraq and for about a year and a half, or so, we were not allowed to work in Iraq.

**Q945 Lord King of Bridgwater:** Are any of your bureaus closed at the moment?

**Mr Souag:** Many are not open. In Iraq we have the office open again but very limited. In northern Iraq, for example, in the area of Kurdistan, our offices were never closed, so it was a question of covering the war, not covering Iraq, because in that area it was fine with them. We do not have an office in Algeria, for example. We had an office and it was closed because of just one programme which criticised some of the ongoing policies there. In Tunisia we are trying to establish a correspondent. We had one reporting sports only, no politics. In many

other places, in Saudi Arabia, we do not have one. In Kuwait, lately, we were allowed to open an office and in Bahrain just in the last six months, or so.

**Q946 Lord King of Bridgwater:** Have Saudi decided a position?

*Mr Souag:* No opening, not even for El Hajj pilgrimage, we were not allowed to go there to cover that.

**Q947 Lord King of Bridgwater:** Would you expect the BBC, if you think you are following an independent and objective reporting policy, will suffer the same problem?

*Mr Souag:* It depends. If the BBC was going to be as bold as Al-Jazeera in dealing with the issues that are there and the problems that are there, probably the Saudis would take some kind of action. I do not know how severe an action they would take. They might deal with a British institution in a different way than with a Qatari institution. There is competition there. Qatar is a small country beside this huge country, there are the politics beyond just the media that would be taken into consideration by Saudi Arabia.

**Q948 Lord King of Bridgwater:** The difficulty of having an objective, I am not quite sure what your footprint is but Arab worldwide coverage is pretty real and yours is only very partial coverage, is that right?

*Mr Souag:* I think it is, yes.

**Q949 Lord King of Bridgwater:** You would not accept propaganda from governments, at Al-Jazeera, would you, if they put out propaganda material?

*Mr Souag:* No. We have people probably who do some propaganda but these are our guests. They can do and they do propaganda but there are always people to respond to them. In Al-Jazeera we have the opinion and the other opinion and we try to bring more than one opinion.

**Q950 Lord King of Bridgwater:** Obviously, it is very fresh in people's minds, because you have accepted terrorist propaganda, yesterday, in publishing the pictures of the kidnap victims taken by terrorists. Also you said you sell footage to other companies. That has now been broadcast by other broadcasters. Do you sell that footage to other broadcasters?

**Mr Souag:** There are two different issues here. We have footage that can be seen in another television station. If you find a buyer you can sell it. When it comes to what you call this terrorist propaganda it is a different story. Most of this so-called terrorist propaganda does not come only to Al-Jazeera. Al-Jazeera put it on because we think that people have the right to know and to see what these people are as they are. I think people are intelligent enough to judge for themselves. If they see somebody holding a gun against a hostage, you are presenting that propaganda, you are giving them a platform, it is true, but people understand a different thing from what they are saying. They see what they are doing, the violence that they are doing, so I think people are intelligent enough to understand. Our interference, I believe, does harm the information that we strive to bring to the people.

**Q951 Chairman:** You do not think you are doing the terrorists' work by showing this?

**Mr Souag:** No. Actually, we think we are doing exactly the opposite. By presenting them, you are giving people the chance to see what is going on, what these people do and to judge for themselves and they think they are wise enough and intelligent enough to do that. We do not have to judge for them.

**Q952 Lord King of Bridgwater:** Why do you think the terrorists give you the tapes?

**Mr Souag:** They do not give the tapes only to us, they give other stations tapes.

**Q953 Lord King of Bridgwater:** It does not matter how many stations they give them to, why do you think they give them to you? Do you think they give them to you because they

want people to have an objective view of what is going on, or they have a message that they want to convey which they think is effective?

**Mr Souag:** I do not know what the reason is. Again, if we go back to the beginning of this whole issue of broadcasting tapes from terrorists, we know that CNN and other stations broadcast bin Laden before we did. There were instances in which we felt that parts, at least, of their tapes perhaps were not suitable because maybe they were trying to say something and we tried not to broadcast it, but later on we found out that CNN was broadcasting it over there in America, in more than one case.

**Q954 Lord Kalms:** Is it possible, do you think, for a broadcaster in the Middle East to give an unbiased, balanced view of the Israeli/Palestinian problem? Do you have an office in Israel, or Jerusalem, and can any organisation, because it is not your organisation we are concerned about, it is the BBC, give a balanced reportage of the conflict?

**Mr Souag:** I think, in every situation like the Palestinian/Israeli issue, it would be very difficult to find anybody who would be completely neutral. We are human beings, we have our feelings and everybody has to bring in some of these feelings, regardless of how objective you want to be. However, as a television channel that strives to bring an objective picture of what is going on, we do something different, actually we do what the BBC does, we bring more than one party to talk about the issue. For the first time, clearly after the BBC Arabic Television, an Arab television station brings Israelis to speak, to be interviewed directly on Al-Jazeera. When we brought these people, everybody said that Al-Jazeera was created by Mossad, by the CIA, etc., because we brought in these people directly. We were talking about the propaganda, talking about bringing bin Laden, or other people, Saddam Hussein, or whoever, in the old days; at the same time we bring George Bush ten times more than we do other people. George Bush has been on Al-Jazeera for full-length speeches for hundreds and

hundreds of hours, because that is what we do. We try to bring to the people what is going on, translated instantly, more than in CNN, by the way.

**Lord Maxton:** That is the equivalent of putting the terrorists on.

**Q955 Lord Kalms:** Do you have an office in Israel; do you have representation in Israel?

**Mr Souag:** Yes, we have, in Jerusalem, in Romallah, in Gaza, and we have four or five offices there and they work with the Israelis.

**Q956 Lord Kalms:** With no restrictions?

**Mr Souag:** There have been some restrictions by the Israelis on the movement of our reporters now and then. Quite often our reporters were seriously harassed or frightened or threatened. At one time, one of our reporters was told by an Israeli soldier “If you don’t move away I will make you urgent news on Al-Jazeera, because that’s what we do, urgent news, you know, that means we will kill you.” It happened more than one time, but still, more or less, they can move and they can report as much as can be done in that kind of very fragile situation.

**Q957 Chairman:** Mr Chebarro, you have been sitting there very patiently for the last half-hour and we are going to bring you in at this particular point. Before we leave Al-Jazeera, could I ask just one factual question, what are your audience figures, how do you estimate that?

**Mr Souag:** I do not take seriously statistics from the Middle East, to tell you the truth, that is why I do not want you to take them seriously, but the figures that are usually stated are between 50 million and 75 million, most people stick with about 50, 55 million.

**Q958 Lord Kalms:** For which countries?

**Mr Souag:** The Middle East, in the Arab areas, North Africa and even in the West, the Arabs, the people who can actually understand Arabic and watch Al-Jazeera.

**Q959 Lord Maxton:** You did mention briefly that in one country you were allowed to show only sport, is that right? Does that mean you have got more than one channel; you have got several?

**Mr Souag:** Yes. Now we have Al-Jazeera News Channel, news and programmes, we have Al-Jazeera Sports 24 hours, we have Al-Jazeera Children and we are going to have Al-Jazeera English soon.

**Q960 Lord Maxton:** When you talk about your viewing figures, is it all of those?

**Mr Souag:** No, I am talking just about Al-Jazeera news and programmes.

**Q961 Chairman:** Let us move to Mr Chebarro. Mr Chebarro, would you tell us, first of all, in the same way as the other two witnesses have done, about the Middle East Broadcasting Centre and how that was formed?

**Mr Chebarro:** It emerged here in London in 1992. We started airing as the first independent satellite channel beaming free-to-air to the Middle East region. It was a variety channel, maybe tailored similar to BBC One, for example, or Two, some three or four news bulletins a day, a lot of emphasis on news because the Arab world likes news, so the research, if we trust it, had shown. That was in 1992. It was a response to the fact that until that time government was the only vehicle of information. Then we were broadcasting out of London, free of Information Ministry's control, here in London, yet you are not totally free of controls if you are broadcasting in Arabic and to 22 Arabic-speaking countries and reporting from the Middle East region. Whoever does news is not totally objective nor totally balanced and not always managing to reach and seek and give the truth plainly and objectively. MBC in 1994, at the

beginning of the floating by the other plan of a BBC Arabic Channel, through Orbit, started to do a feasibility study about the possibility of a 24-hour news channel. At that time market research, again, showed that there was no need for such a channel. They moved on, they kept the service as a single channel with news emphasis until the BBC came up and then left the market briefly afterwards and then Al-Jazeera started to gain audience, and not until February 2003 did our group see the necessity of launching an Arabic 24-hour news channel, called Al-Arabiya, the Arab One. Again, ethos, we can speak about the opinion and other opinion of Al-Jazeera, we have truth, courage and objectivity, basically, as our ethos. In a brief period of time, again, working in the Arab states, as both my colleagues know, is very difficult, we established a presence in approximately all 22 Arab states, apart from one, which is Qatar. Behind my group there is some Saudi money, funding, i.e. it is a business group.

**Q962 Chairman:** A private group?

*Mr Chebarro:* A private group, yes. We have a business which has some revenue from advertising. We do not have an office in Qatar. At some point in time our offices even there have been closed or were subject to certain attacks.

**Q963 Chairman:** Like where?

*Mr Chebarro:* In Iraq, for example, in September 2004 we got bombed. We have lost five reporters so far in Iraq, some by American 'friendly' fire, or unfriendly fire, and some others by insurgent car bombs, assassination attempt and abduction. One of our colleagues is still in American custody with no chance of getting a lawyer to him. Another one is undergoing spinal injury rehabilitation in a Buckinghamshire hospital. All part and parcel of doing and trying to do news in the Middle East or in a hot area like Iraq.

**Q964 Chairman:** In Iraq, you stand in the middle and you are fired at from both sides?

**Mr Chebarro:** We are fired at from both sides yet we still have a presence. We are still trying to work in Baghdad, around Baghdad and in other hot spots in Iraq as well as other parts of the world.

**Q965 Chairman:** Sometimes we forget how difficult it is to report, is it not, from Iraq and that area? You started this new service in 2003, we have just been told not to trust any figures, how do you estimate your audience figures?

**Mr Chebarro:** Again, we have commercial revenue of a certain level, we have, basically, commercial entities that are trying really to gauge the mood and understand what our viewership level is. They bore us with lots of graphs and stuff at various times of the day but, as my colleague said, it is anything between 30 million and 70, 80 million, depending on which part of the spectrum you are whether you believe them or not, but estimates say, observers say, that the viewership is split in the middle between us and Al-Jazeera at certain, various different hours of the day. We are seen widely in Iraq but maybe less widely in Saudi, and vice versa.

**Q966 Chairman:** In two years you have managed to establish this figure?

**Mr Chebarro:** We benefited from the infrastructure of MBC, which was the Arabic independent channel, established in 1992, after Iraq's invasion of Kuwait. Therefore having a footprint was much easier than starting from zero.

**Chairman:** With all this background, can we now apply this knowledge and experience to the BBC.

**Q967 Lord Holme of Cheltenham:** I am very interested in what you said about the size of your audiences, and it invites the question is there room in the market, first of all, for a new BBC Arabic service and I would like to ask this question of all three of you? A

supplementary to that is whether there is a market space for it, is there an editorial space for it and is there a set of values that the BBC represents which are needed, which are superior? We have already heard that perhaps Al-Jazeera thinks their independence and impartiality are superior to that of the BBC, nevertheless is there a space for the BBC in the market and in terms of an editorial need which is unmet particularly for independent news coverage? The third question is, in your personal opinion, as it can be only a personal opinion, what would be seen to be the reputation and strength and credibility of the BBC as an objective bringer of independent, balanced news and current affairs to the Middle East and the Arab world? I would be very interested in the reactions of all of you to that.

**Mr Richardson:** I suppose you might expect me to say this but the experience with World Service over 27 years was that the BBC did help a great deal in many areas by being a benchmark for quality journalism and for production values and I think that should not be underestimated. The first time round with Arabic Television, I am happy to admit that it was not all that brilliant to start with, it was a bit ragged around the edges, but it was better than anything else that was available, far, far better. I think, without BBC Arabic Television, television media across the Middle East would be very different today. I accept what Mostefa says, that there were already plans for Al-Jazeera towards the end of BBC Arabic Television but I have no doubt that if we had not set a standard which others wished to follow then it would be different.

**Q968 Lord Holme of Cheltenham:** Of course, that is history, and whether it is cause and effect, as you described, or whether it is just the development of competition, we do have now two substantial broadcasting presences, both of which represent that they have some of the values and editorial quality and standards of the BBC. Looking at it today, I would be interested in your opinion of whether there is a market and editorial space for what is being suggested?

**Mr Richardson:** I think there is a market for a good quality product, and this is where we come back to the funding of it, because my view is that if it is not done well it should not be done at all. I do have in the back of my mind, with respect, that, Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya, their editorial independence is pretty fragile. It may appear to be strong but if the Emir of Qatar felt the need to change the editorial policy of it, it is his company at the moment and so I think, in that respect, it is a little fragile, whereas I would hope that the BBC's editorial independence is not.

**Mr Souag:** If I start where Ian ended, probably personally and I think the Al-Jazeera people, I was in Qatar when the news about the plan to start this BBC Arabic Television came out, people were actually quite welcoming, they want a station that might be good competition to start maybe to activate the media environment a little bit more, because everybody respects the BBC. Moreover, if there is BBC Arabic Television and the Emir decides to change the editorial stance, at least we will have a place to go to, to be a little bit blunt. We have no reason to believe that the Emir of Qatar would change his mind about Al-Jazeera and Al-Jazeera's editorial stance. There is every indication that probably we will get even more support from the Emir of Qatar, rather than less, in terms of what we are doing. Is there a need? I think the more we have of objective reporting, of good programmes, the better for the Arab countries to enhance the extent towards objective reporting, towards the freedom of expression, the freedom of the media, certainly. With different stations in the Middle East, let us say, for example, a lot of people in the Middle East would think Al-Jazeera, regardless of how objective it looked, "it must work for the Qatari's, it must do some propaganda for the Qatari's, even if you don't see it," they say there must be something there. The same thing would be said about Al-Arabiya, because it comes from different countries with some competition, with some problems in-between, but when it comes from the BBC, "At least, one thing, the British Government support it but it is still the BBC, we know they have standards."

It might actually help to show that these are the right standards, that they are followed by Al-Jazeera or by Al-Arabiya because they are also followed by the BBC. I assume there is space for them. There is always a need for better reportage, for enhancing that kind of track.

**Q969 Lord Holme of Cheltenham:** Would the Arab person on the street think that, because it is the BBC and they have from radio some knowledge of and experience of the BBC, let alone the recent experiment, the BBC would represent independence, or would they think that this was a propaganda tool of the British Government whose policies from time to time are unpopular in the Arab world? Which would it be? Would they see the BBC the way we like to see it, as independent of Government, or would they see it as somehow an instrument of British Government propaganda?

**Mr Souag:** I would say yes for both. There are people who will see it this way and people who will see it that way, especially, for example, governments. If BBC Arabic Television would really respect its standards and be what the BBC should be then a lot of people would believe that this was real journalism, etc., but a lot of people would follow mostly the official propaganda against anything that they do not like, that “this is coming from the West so they are just working for the oil interests.” However, if you will allow me, there is one point to make here. If the BBC is going to start this channel, it has to be sure that it is going to continue for a little while, that it will not stop within a year or two, or whatever, that is one thing; secondly, it is not going to back off when the pressures start. One of the reasons, in my opinion, that maybe the BBC Arabic Television stopped was not just that Orbit decided to close it but also I think the British Government could have said “This is too big and too important an institution at this point to close down and it’s going to hurt the reputation of the BBC,” because people would see it as a complete influence by Saudi Arabia or the Saudis on the BBC itself. They should have come in and given them money, at least for a little while, just to take that perception away and then they do whatever they want, because there is going

to be a lot of pressure from business groups. In Saudi Arabia, if the Saudis were to say, “The BBC is reporting this way, I’m not going to give you the project, we are going to give it to the Americans or Germans,” there might be some pressures there, and I understand at that time there was that kind of pressure. It was a time when the (Yemaneh ?) project was negotiated with the British Government and I think there was a lot of pressure in that respect. They have to be sure about this.

**Mr Chebarro:** I returned from the region a couple of days ago, and definitely the news that everybody was asking about in the professional field, i.e. the intellectuals, professional Arab journalists, was “When is this project going to be launched?” i.e. the BBC. For our station, it is just another welcome competitor, a respected channel, a respected entity getting into the media. We have to remember that there are lots of players in the Middle East, cross-regional, cross-country channels, there are in excess of 50 channels, all on satellite, free-to-air, competing for the viewers, and the BBC definitely can stand apart, as far as competition is concerned, from the rest. Yet I think one sceptical point of view here, that you would hear in the Middle East, is “Why Arabic?” because, let us be frank, news is not an innocent product. As much as we would take the value of the BBC on board, it is still another, it depends how you can find a use, therefore the product will determine it. From the previous part, when Mr Richardson was talking about the standards and the ethos of the BBC in Arabic in the mid nineties, I do not know, the set standards of the BBC English were there. Did we reflect that in the Arabic service, how far was it reflected, this is another question. The television industry is a new industry in the Middle East and does not have the long experience and expertise of the national broadcasting companies such as the BBC, so there was pressure on funding and finding especially the human asset, of finding independent-minded reporters who are capable of reporting the story as it is. If it is translation, as in the first round of the BBC, in the mid nineties, i.e. the re-package of the BBC material translated into Arabic and voiced

over by an Arabic-speaking journalist, that is one thing. Then putting a fully-fledged service from A to Z by bureaus in the region I think is a costly business and I wonder whether anybody is ready to foot the bill if it is going to stay without advertising and commercially competitive.

**Q970 Lord King of Bridgwater:** What is the image at the moment of the BBC? There is plenty of radio broadcasting here. The man in the Arab street, does he have a high respect for the BBC or does he not know much about it?

**Mr Chebarro:** Every household opens on the BBC World Service radio in Arabic first thing in the morning, or English if they are educated, as far as I remember, growing up in a house in the Middle East. Yet was it always seen as positive, it was a different source of information in the absence of multi sources of information in every state, whereby the information industry was controlled by the state. The situation has been different from the nineties onwards, there are different outlets, different sources of information and there were ups and downs in the perception as well of the BBC from the days of the Suez crisis and a lot of the information that was published then and after that. Today we would say that the Iraq expedition, or war, could also cloud this view, and we are talking about people's perception, it would cloud their perception, but overall the BBC has a good name whereby it is another source of information, respected and reputed and believed to be objective or closer to the truth.

**Q971 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** You said that you, the professionals, are happy about the idea of this BBC television service. Is that true of the Arabic governments, would you say?

**Mr Chebarro:** I think that the governments, till now, are trying to swallow, or get used to, basically, the current information revolution that the area has witnessed. The professionals

welcome the BBC and I think, the governments, in a global world they cannot say no to the BBC. The BBC is entering lots of houses anyway through the excellent service the World English Service provides. But, it is not reaching the masses. There is a sceptical question by these governments why now you want to repeat an experiment, like the Americans did a couple of years ago, Al-Hurra, the free one, basically to propagate freedom, democracy, and get the message right. For some reason they think Al-Jazeera, Al-Arabiya and other national TV stations are not getting the message right and they are airing lots of propaganda. Let us face it, there is a situation in the Arab world whereby what is cross-national news could be aired on a broad channel, there is the Palestinian question and there is the Iraqi question and these are where there is consensus about how to report and where to report and when to report them. With the BBC, I wonder what else could be brought in. It will bring in better production values and it will bring in better objective input. If it is not going to report from the region it is going to be seen as an element importing news from outside it. Al-Hurra is seen clearly as a vehicle of American hegemony within the intellectuals and the street switch it off, because I do not see it saying anything or adding any news value or information value. This will be the challenge. The BBC has an aim and it is risking a lot by going on with this.

**Q972 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** I think what they say is that they want to bring the world as regional, maybe, in their news, as you both have been. You have both talked about having offices closed down and I think neither of you have offices in Saudi Arabia.

**Mr Chebarro:** We do have.

**Q973 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** You do; I am sorry. Do both of you have full access to all the countries you broadcast to, from the point of view of the signal being reached, people being able to watch your programmes, whatever?

*Mr Chebarro:* Yes, absolutely. I believe that there is no restriction on the signal. Nobody could jam your signal, it is free-to-air and it has obviously catered for the tools and the machines of the state there.

**Q974 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** The BBC will be able to reach everywhere it wishes to reach?

*Mr Chebarro:* I believe that. If they pick up all the relevant satellites which are picked up free to air there should not be a problem.

**Q975 Lord Maxton:** You buy satellite time, do you? How many satellites do you use?

*Mr Souag:* The technical part I really do not know, but I know that, for Al-Jazeera, for example, in Saudi Arabia we cannot open an office there, we cannot even send somebody to report from there.

*Mr Chebarro:* In Qatar, they revoked the nationality of our reporter in Qatar and kicked him out of the country as well. They took his passport and citizenship.

*Mr Souag:* It could be. I do not really know what happened.

*Mr Chebarro:* There is an information war in the region.

**Q976 Lord Maxton:** Could I ask also, however, which is quite important, because we are talking rather glibly about the people in the street across the Arab world, but presumably that is going to be neither the BBC's audience or, to some extent, your audience, if you are talking of 30 million, or 50 million even, out of the 250 million, it is still a relatively small part of the population and presumably it is the professional, middle-class audience that is watching both your services and will watch the BBC services. To what extent are you or the BBC likely to reach down to, if you like, the man on the street, the average person living in fairly poor conditions in parts of the Middle East?

**Mr Souag:** Talking about Al-Jazeera, I think actually a portion of our audience is from these poor people, because the only entertainment, practically, in the Middle East is television.

**Mr Chebarro:** It is cheap.

**Mr Souag:** Cheap, and people are very politicised, people are very aware, even the people who have never gone to school still can talk to you about the international issues with quite a lot of knowledge. Actually, this is another issue. I have noticed that from the beginning you have been concentrating on the BBC in the Middle East, how it works in the Middle East and reporting from the Middle East. A television channel of this kind is not going to be reporting only from the Middle East, the Middle East is just a small region. In Al-Jazeera, sometimes, if we have a one-hour bulletin, it might take half an hour in the Middle East because most of the explosive things are in the Middle East, but very often you might have 45 minutes of nothing about the Middle East, about the war, because this is an international channel, it is not a channel about Arab issues.

**Q977 Chairman:** To interrupt you, I am not sure that the vision of the BBC would be much different from what you are saying?

**Mr Souag:** Exactly, and the audience would look into not only what is reported about the Middle East or from the Middle East but also what is reported about the war then how it is reported. The BBC has to compete for its reputation with what it does.

**Q978 Lord Maxton:** The BBC, in order to get down to that audience, will have to spend quite a lot of money presumably on marketing as well as just on putting out the service, will they not? Will they not somehow have to get the message across that this service is now available?

**Mr Richardson:** I think the message will get across very quickly, apart from the radio side of it, certainly they will know about it. One of the things that Orbit was most concerned about

was that once you start broadcasting in Arabic you do get to the people in the street. They are not worried so much about CNN or BBC World because that gets to the elite, and the elite are judged to be smart enough and wise enough to take this sort of information. When you get into Arabic and it gets right down into the slums or into just ordinary working-class areas that is what worries them and when Orbit started off they charged \$10,000 as a subscription, to make sure that it was an elite channel.

**Q979 Chairman:** Can we go back a moment to Mr Chebarro. I have got down here a quote of yours, and I think I quote it accurately: “People will look with cynicism to the new venture” that is of the BBC “if it takes off, especially given the British position as a strong ally to the US and the US and coalition military situation.” There you are equating the BBC with the British Government, and is that the point that you are making?

**Mr Chebarro:** That was part of an interview and only a soundbite was taken out, as usual when one is under pressure of time.

**Q980 Chairman:** So the journalist bit on it?

**Mr Chebarro:** Exactly. I said in the same soundbite that it is a welcome addition to the range of information, yet when I was asked specifically how the viewers will see it, it is always a double-edged sword, you do not know where it is going to fit, but there is, as my colleague Mostefa was saying, this high awareness, there is also high association. The public is aware of what is happening in Iraq and the public is aware that news gathering and news operation is not just an innocent operation of information. In some countries they call it fourth authority, in others they call it an objective tool and in others they call it a watchdog, basically. Yes, there will be especially I said that the American channel was seen as another extension of the policy of the US, whereby they say but they are losing in the information war, that the messages coming out of the Middle East are not taking on board hundreds of hours of

speeches of President Bush on Al-Jazeera or even on Al-Arabiya, whereas they reckon that there is a problem of radicalisation within the Arab street that they need to address and reach out. So to speak, if the BBC enters the race for viewership, it could be seen as another propaganda tool. Traditionally, the BBC has always been seen as an independent, objective force, yet it is risking a reputation, but at various times of the history of information from the region it was maybe tarnished or put in question, so this is at stake today for the BBC.

**Q981 Chairman:** Therefore, will it depend upon the quality of the service that is provided?

**Mr Chebarro:** Basically, it is trying to reconcile 22 different Arab streets and 22 different viewerships available in 22 different countries of that region.

**Q982 Lord Armstrong of Ilminster:** I wonder if I could go back just for a moment to Mr Richardson's expectation that the provision of this BBC Arabic Television Service will be much more expensive than they are reckoning. I think we were told that it was expecting to cost £19 million a year for the 12-hour service which they will be projecting. Do you think that is a gross underestimate?

**Mr Richardson:** I think it is a pretty serious underestimate because I see, yesterday, was it, the Managing Director of Al-Jazeera talked about the hundred million dollars that go into Al-Jazeera Arabic each year, and I have been told, and I think probably it is pretty accurate, that a hundred million dollars is going into Al-Jazeera English, the channel which is being launched next month. I understand that Channel Four News, which is about 40 minutes of content five days a week, has got a budget of £20 million. It is a serious underfunding, in my view. Now that there is the competition with Al-Jazeera and Al-Arabiya and other channels coming along, it worries me.

**Q983 Lord Maxton:** When they were here yesterday, the BBC told us that they intended to stream their new Arabic service on the internet service as well and also, more particularly probably, if you are talking about a bigger audience, onto the new mobile 'phones as well. Do you do that, or are you intending to do that as well, or do you see the BBC maybe as gaining an edge on you in that?

**Mr Chebarro:** I think we have internet streaming. You can tap into the address and you can see basically our broadcast up to the minute. There is what you call revenue, and this is all aimed maybe at revenue, I understand, from the mobile 'phone, which is up-to-the-minute information via mobile 'phone. That needs subscription and is another way of measuring who is tapping into your information and service. Yes, we are already giving to mobile telephones and I think Al-Jazeera does the same.

**Mr Souag:** Yes, the same thing.

**Mr Chebarro:** I think also the streaming on the net as well of the broadcast, so it is something which is already being done.

**Chairman:** I am immensely grateful. Actually we could go on for very much longer on this but, as you understand, we have another witness waiting. I think it has been totally fascinating and thank you very much for the way you have given your evidence. Thank you.

Witness: **Lord Triesman**, a Member of the House, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, examined.

**Q984 Chairman:** Good morning, Lord Triesman. I am sorry we have kept you waiting a little. We had three witnesses beforehand and it took just a little bit longer than we thought. I think you know what we are about. We have produced our first Report and published that and that will be debated in about a week's time in the Lords. We were conscious of the fact that there were a number of areas which we did not have the time to do full justice to and one of these was BBC World Service, which obviously was a very important part. I wonder if I could start in this way. I note that, as part of the Spending Review 2004 settlement, the Foreign Office agreed to undertake a review on the effectiveness of public diplomacy work. Lord Carter of Coles was appointed to carry out that review. The review has not yet been published but it does seem that the role of BBC World Service fell within the remit of that review. Could you explain why you consider BBC World Service to be one of the Government's public diplomacy tools?

**Lord Triesman:** I think, if we are going to try to reach out into the world and convey a sense of what the United Kingdom is like, we need a number of ways of doing that and there are a limited number of options, apart from all the options in private society and business, and so on. The public options are the British Council, the World Service, because it has a presence pretty much everywhere in the world, and one or two other, very important institutions, including the Chevening scholarships and fellowships, which are important, which bring people into this country to get a sense of what we do. To make that successful, in my judgment, the services that we provide have to be seen in the rest of the world as being of first-rate quality and they have to be seen as having genuine independence. They may be pulling in the same strategic direction but in the content of what they do they have to have a sense of real independence, because if they do not have that people do not trust them and it is

critical that they are trusted. I think it helps convey what we do but it does it based on, in the case of the World Service, dealing with issues throughout the world, in news coverage and cultural coverage and other forms of coverage, in a very, very responsible and very objective way which people have come to respect, I think, probably above all other international broadcasting players.

**Q985 Chairman:** Really what you are saying is that any advantage that the BBC has in its programmes is an indirect one?

**Lord Triesman:** I think it is a mixture, Lord Fowler, of direct and indirect. It is indirect in the sense that it is reputational, and the reputational elements are built out of the overall quality of what it does everywhere, and that is probably quite hard to define because it is a process which takes place over very, very many years, no-one gets a reputation on day one, it has got to be achieved over a period of time. I think it is then a direct one in the sense that people can look at this as a British institution and say “Is this a country that is capable of dealing with very complex issues, in very difficult parts of the world, with real objectivity, with impartiality?” and the answer is yes. Does that say something of us as a nation and as a people? I think the answer to that is also yes.

**Q986 Chairman:** You think the independence of the BBC and the values that the BBC follows are a vast advantage, as far as the country is concerned?

**Lord Triesman:** I think they are a huge asset and I compare them with other international broadcast media and I can see the difference between the two. The distinction that I would like to introduce, in response to that question, because of course it is the question at the heart of all of this, is that, I think, as Government, we have an absolute responsibility to stand well clear of the editorial independence of the BBC and the content of its programmes and its practice in programming. What the World Service and the other parts of public diplomacy

need to do is face in a general strategic direction that is useful to the United Kingdom, because they are heavily dependent upon public finance and we have an interest for which we are answerable in Parliament, and should be.

**Q987 Chairman:** You would not wish, under any circumstances, to interfere with the BBC's independence?

**Lord Triesman:** Its editorial independence, no, I would not. If someone put the proposition to me that we should, I would fight that proposition very fiercely. Do I believe that we should try to have proper mechanisms to steer the strategy, that is the where rather than the what, if I can put it that way, and I do think we have a genuine interest in that and that is an interest that the taxpayers are entitled to see us exercise.

**Q988 Chairman:** When Mr Murdoch quoted Mr Blair telling him in a conversation that the BBC World Service coverage was "full of hate of America," gloating about our troubles, that is simply an expression of opinion that anyone might make?

**Lord Triesman:** Yes, and he does have robust opinions, I have noticed that, from time to time. I think it would be unfair to characterise the World Service in that way, but the World Service's decisions on editorial content are their decisions.

**Q989 Chairman:** Alastair Campbell, or whoever has taken his place, would not get on the 'phone to the World Service and say "This is the Prime Minister's view; you want to do something about this"?

**Lord Triesman:** I am pretty confident that I can say no.

**Q990 Lord Armstrong of Ilminster:** I just wonder if public diplomacy is the right way to describe this, because diplomacy implies kind of active work around the place and what you are describing is much more like a pervasive influence, that something about the British way

or British objectivity is projected by the BBC World Service greatly to the advantage of Britain in its international affairs but, in a sense, indirect, in terms of government-inspired diplomacy?

**Lord Triesman:** I was curious, when I was first appointed to the Foreign Office and found this in my brief, as to why the particular words had been chosen, because exactly those issues went through my mind. I have to admit, I have not been able to find better words. I suppose there is some justification in the content of the words, in that, in our discussions, the annual discussion in particular, with the BBC World Service, which Michael Grade attends, as Chair of the Governors, there is a good, strong discussion about where in the world it is useful to be. In that sense that is, of course, a political choice and I do not think it would be sensible to hide from the fact that it is a political choice. I believe that the BBC has reviewed the political choices made, the advice that it has given has been good, I think the Foreign Office has responded well to that advice and I think we have got the right outcomes. I must say, I hope we have got the right outcomes in a timely way, because some of these discussions seem to me to have taken so long that on occasions we are entitled to worry that we may be behind again.

**Q991 Lord Holme of Cheltenham:** We have just heard evidence from the competitors of the BBC in the Middle East, from Al-Arabiya and from Al-Jazeera, and on the whole a very fair-minded response to the prospect of the BBC entering an Arabic service. The point was made that the good reputation of the BBC for objectivity, impartiality, balance, part of the values, if you like, of the British way of doing things, which the FCO has an interest in, could be tainted by the policies of the British Government. Clearly the BBC are in no position to do anything about the policies of Her Majesty's Government, but I think the flip side of that is what clear assurances and protection can the FCO and the Government in general put in place, not just to viewers in the Middle East but to people in this country whose money is being

spent on this, that the independence will be absolutely assured and that there will be no tinkering and no hanky-panky? The reason this is important is that it could affect the trust which you talked about just now as being the key characteristic of the reputation, both of the BBC and of Britain, if you like, a trustworthy organisation and a trustworthy country, that could affect it fatally. I think the bit that is difficult is this word 'strategic'. Strategic suggests geopolitical objectives being executed through public diplomacy rather than suggesting the rather more benign halo effect of a good image, British Council type work that you were also talking about. What have you got in mind to make sure, in terms of this new station being successful, that it is absolutely ring-fenced, because it is difficult enough in this country, with people biting the legs of the BBC, to retain impartiality, how much more difficult when there are these momentous issues in a very contested region? What are you going to do to make sure it is independent and is seen to be independent?

**Lord Triesman:** The first thing I think any government has to do is make its position clear and make that position clear on the record. I have done so myself a number of times. I have made it clear, as I have today, on the record that any attempt, or any suggestion that there should be an attempt, to interfere in the editorial independence of the BBC World Service, whether it is radio broadcasting or its websites or any of the new media or the new Arabic television station, which is a very important venture, if that is compromised in any way then the whole of the objective would be foiled. I am wholly on the record, as are other members of the Government, that there will be no interference in the editorial policies. Incidentally, I should add that when Lord Carter approaches these same questions, and I hope it will be reflected in the Report when it appears, those comments will be made in just as robust a way. I just say that again. Secondly, it is a very difficult enterprise launching television in a market which is already reasonably crowded and where there are other stations which have had a number of years and have got going; they are serious competition. I think, if the BBC were

thought to be a vehicle for propaganda, rather than a vehicle for impartial coverage, they would have not only the difficult hill to climb in taking on competition in a crowded media market but they would have failure built in from the beginning. I do not think it would be in anybody's interest for there to be any taint of that kind at all, if they are to succeed in that competition. The final point I would make, very briefly, is this. Of course people sometimes say that there is public money going in, does that not mean, as it does in other countries, that the government which puts in that money exerts some sort of an influence; well, I think it is right that public money goes into the BBC, possibly people will always raise that question. The only answer to it is, day by day, content by content, can you analyse what they do and say it is genuinely independent, clearly independent, reflects impartiality in the programmes that are broadcast. If anybody, as it goes forward, has criticisms on those latter fronts then I think we have got to be able to deal with them very strongly. We will not interfere in its independence.

**Q992 Lord King of Bridgwater:** I think one of the problems you have got is that other governments do not believe you. I think I recall '*The Death of a Princess*', that the Saudi Government found it inconceivable that the British Government could not actually organise the BBC and that was a programme which was funded by the licence fee-payer, and the Government had that defence, that they did not have any financial role. Here we have a situation in which you are funding it, you are funding the whole thing. Does it occur to you that, and certainly the message that came across from our other witnesses just now was, you are supporting the launch of a programme at a particularly sensitive time in the Middle East, when the British reputation in certain areas is extremely low and it would be seen to be, to quote Lord Holme, in the strategic interest of the British Government to get a better image for itself and its policy there? You are going in there, and with much more immediacy, via

television, risking the reputation of the BBC, putting it in a much more controversial area, where people will not believe that it is independent of Government?

**Lord Triesman:** I think you are absolutely right. The fact is there will be some governments and some other media outputters who will never accept that the BBC conceivably can be wholly independent. On occasions I run into the foreign ministers of other countries who put it to me in terms that I should 'phone the BBC' or intervene with the BBC and stop them criticising President whoever, and I say it is nonsense, and I try to say it as diplomatically as I can, of course, this is not the way we work and nor is it conceivable. As to timing, I think it is a very important issue. Personally, I would have hoped that we could have got to the position where we had an Arabic-language T.V. service rather longer ago. It would have required other changes to take place rather earlier, which is why I made the point about making changes in a timely way, anticipating events, but I am glad it is now happening. I think that what people will find is, in practice, whatever criticisms there may be and the anxieties, that in a media environment in which there is a great deal of misrepresentation of this country and of events locally, where there is often a tolerance of terrorism in broadcasting, the BBC is impartial in all of those areas, that it tells a truthful story. I make that point because, whatever the timing of the start of it, and often we do not get to pick the times exactly as we might choose, it will then take time to establish a reputation. Reputation is not established, as we know, overnight, but I would rather start now and feel that we have established a reputation over the next few years than wait until we feel there is a more propitious time. I do not know when that more propitious time will arrive.

**Q993 Baroness Gibson of Market Rasen:** Can you explain to us how some of the grant in aid is set? Also, can you explain to us what the benefits are of the World Service for the UK taxpayer?

**Lord Triesman:** Let me start with the benefits and then come on to how we fund those benefits. I think the benefits are that there is a first-class, international, high reputation broadcaster, as I have said, independent and known to be independent, even if there are squeamish people around in the rest of the world about whether it is, but where impartiality is the hallmark of what is broadcast. Also I think that, increasingly, because through digital radio you can hear broadcasts in this country, there is now a greater benefit, which could be greatly extended. I will just make the point, when I go home at night and turn on my radio the default station to which it goes is the World Service, which I find an extraordinarily valuable asset. I would like to feel that in many of the communities in, for example, the African diaspora there would be a lot more of that available to them than there is at the moment. I think it has got very, very high values outside and very high values inside the United Kingdom for taxpayers. The budget is set in an annual process. The process really goes ahead in blocks which correspond to the Comprehensive Spending Review periods so that there is some stability in overall funding but there is a review which goes ahead within that each year. For example, during the 2002 strategic decisions on spending there were decisions to increase the amount that was available by an extra £48 million, bringing it up to £239 million in this financial year, and in 2004 an extra £19 million to develop the new media services, these are web-delivered services and they deliver access in some of the ways which it is evident people are now more attracted to, or find easier to get hold of, and are very valuable assets as they are rolled out. There is a forward plan which gets adjusted as these new things come along. The consequence, just to put it in figures, for next year of the expenditure will be that there will be £246 million spent on the service next year. Part of this process involves a very thorough discussion in the annual scheme with the BBC and I have to say that the World Service comes forward with some electrifying proposals which will

involve very much higher expenditure, and on occasions, valued as it is, we have to say we think that is going rather further than the taxpayer should allow.

**Q994 Chairman:** Could you let us have the figures on perhaps the spending over the last ten years, as far as the World Service is concerned?

**Lord Triesman:** Certainly.

**Chairman:** I think that would be quite helpful.

**Lord King of Bridgwater:** I would like to raise a question about the cost of the particular funding of the Arabic service. We have just had evidence Al-Jazeera are launching an English service. They are raising, I think, \$100 million to fund it. The unanimous view of the three witnesses we had before was that the funds available for launching this, which I think are £19 million, are woefully inadequate.

**Chairman:** I am sorry to interrupt. We are coming later to that.

**Q995 Lord Peston:** Could I still partly take us back to what Lord King started us off on a few minutes ago, about the whole enterprise here. To my knowledge, lots of Arab people believe that the BBC is strongly pro-Israel and is in the pockets of the Americans and is not to be trusted. Equally, many Jewish people believe, largely because of the history of the Foreign Office in this area, that the BBC is totally pro-Arab and traditionally so. I take the view that if the BBC has managed to offend both sides in this extreme way they must have got it exactly right, but, following what Lord King was trying, I think, to get you to say some more on, is this not a very dangerous area at this time for the BBC to decide to expand into? In other words, in terms of objectivity, in terms of what the BBC ought to be doing, is the probability of it all going wrong not so high that perhaps they ought to have stuck with the Czechs and the Slovaks, and all of that? Did you get involved in discussions exactly along those lines and do you have a view on that?

**Lord Triesman:** I do have a view. The first part of that view, I agree with you, is that if everybody is disgruntled we are probably roughly on the right route. There is no question about it, whoever you talk to thinks the choices have been wrong. My view is really this, if I can elaborate very slightly on the points I made to Lord King, I believe that we should have been more attentive to the development of the Arabic-speaking world some time ago. I do not think we have missed the boat but I think we were in real danger of having missed the boat, and that is why I think it is right to do it now, and if I thought if we did not do it now would it be slightly more favourable in a year's time, I have no reason to think that in a year's time, or two years' time, it would necessarily be any easier. I think that is just the hard, political reality of it. In those circumstances, if we are to try, not by propaganda but by honest coverage, to offset some of the more extreme propositions that are broadcast, every hour of every day, in the Arab-speaking world then we ought to get on with that. Will that be of greater value than trying to broadcast in the former Soviet bloc? In my judgment, yes, not because I think the former Soviet bloc is uninteresting but because we did the fundamental job that was needed there at the time that it was needed and it had the impact that was intended, about opening the window on what the world could be like rather than the shuttered-off world in which those countries lived. That proposed change reflects, I think, modern objectives and I think it is right to do it. As I have said, sorry to repeat the point, had we done it three years ago I suspect the competition with Al-Jazeera and others might have been slightly easier; now it is quite tough but, tough or not, it is right to do it.

**Q996 Lord Kalms:** I thought I would just pick up a point that Lord Peston made. The analogy between the fact that the BBC is seen often in this country as being prejudiced towards Israel, that is alright here because we are, in a sense, outside the conflict, but in the Middle East they are not outside the conflict, they are totally within the issue, and the fact is that the Arab-Israeli conflict is fundamental to all the Arab countries, they are, in effect, in

total conflict with Israel. Is it possible, within those absolute dimensions, that the BBC can come in and somehow create a balance in the news that it gives? It would be a bit like saying that during the war the BBC ought to have represented Hitler's view; obviously, it could not, we had to see only the British view looking out. Now you are trying to put the BBC right in the centre of what is the major issue of the ideological battle between Palestine and Israel, and it seems to me that the BBC is going to get a bloody nose out of this. I cannot see the line it can take, it will naturally, inevitably, have to take the home side view, and that seems to me to be putting the BBC initially, or soon, at a disadvantage. Do you not see this as the great big danger of this whole concept, of moving into this area and taking a terrific reputation, which came out of every other witness, the terrific reputation of the BBC, and putting it on the line?

**Lord Triesman:** I think that the BBC has put its reputation, in that sense, on the line many times. It did it throughout the cold war. It was routinely described by the regimes in Eastern Europe and by the Soviet Union as being no more than a mouthpiece for the British Government and it was attacked roundly and, in many countries when they could, blocked as a broadcaster. It is blocked to this day in China because it is simply a mouthpiece, as they would put it, of the British Government, and the Chinese take great exception to broadcasting freely. I just make that point to you, Lord Kalms, because I anticipate also that there will be a good deal of hostility on this occasion and this is a steep hill to climb, genuinely I accept that. What I think we should learn from the history of it though is that the BBC's capacity to build a reputation over a period of time finally overcomes those gradients and I think it will on this occasion as well. It will be very, very hard. As Minister for Africa, as I go round Africa, I meet politicians in Africa who say "The BBC World Service only appears to support the Opposition," and I say "What they cover is a matter for them," but, from what I have heard, that appears to me to be untrue, and I cannot follow all the languages that are used but from the ones I have heard in English that appears to me to be untrue. Gradually, over a period of

time, you do find people who say, “Actually, I’ve got to accept there was coverage which seemed to be good and objective and reflects what you’ve said, what you’ve claimed for the BBC.” It is very hard. Is it worth taking on something that hard; in my judgment, yes. Do I believe that the BBC will be able to step up to the plate and succeed despite it being that hard, yes, precisely because we have seen them do it.

**Q997 Lord Kalms:** What we have heard from several of the people this morning were the words ‘high-risk strategy’, that the BBC is now entering into an area of high-risk strategy. It seems to be a little bit that they are betting the company, one of the rules you make in business, you never bet the company on anything, you take serious, calculated decisions. In many ways we are betting the company, we are betting the BBC will come through this. If we get this wrong then our terrific reputation, which quite clearly has been established, is at risk, the words ‘high-risk strategy’ come very much to mind. I emphasise it to you.

**Lord Triesman:** The new service has got to succeed on a number of fronts. We talked about it reputationally and whether it will establish its credentials quickly enough and against pressure from others. It has also got to deal with this service financially. Broadcasting in the Arabic-speaking world has not been a secure financial project in the past, so there are big issues there. I think it is right to identify all of those issues. I do not believe it will fail because I think they will succeed in this and I think there is risk but I do not think it is an incalculable risk in that ‘betting the company’ mode. Even if it were not to succeed on either the reputational route, and it did not achieve the right sort of coverage and penetration into the markets in the Arabic-speaking world, or indeed if it failed financially, the BBC World Service would still be there across the globe and successful across the globe, so I do not think the company goes down, in that sense. I do not want to finish on that kind of negative note because, it is very interesting to me, all sorts of other providers in the Arabic-speaking world have told me that it would be a disastrous enterprise to embark on. When a major competitor

tells me something is a disastrous route, you would never open an electronics shop in the high street, would you, if you listened to the competitors.

**Chairman:** I think, to be fair to our previous two witnesses, that was not quite the flavour of what they were giving to us.

**Q998 Baroness Bonham-Carter of Yarnbury:** Sorry, just to press you on this point. The fact is that television is a very different medium from radio and has the ability to be much more provocative and, as we have heard, this particular service is being aimed at the working people, not at the elite, so it is not quite the cold war analogy, where I think it was more the governments, was it not, who were objecting to what was being broadcast? Just to go back on this point, are you not concerned that the BBC World Service television channel, in an area which is rife with sensitivity, might undermine both the reputation of the World Service itself and the role it plays representing Britain.

**Lord Triesman:** Just for clarity, I think that during the cold war period World Service broadcasting was aimed at all sorts of different strata. There was a very strong desire to get to the citizens of countries and open that window on what the rest of the world was like when others tried to keep it closed. In this case, it is true that the ambition is to get to what is called sometimes the Arab street; that is absolutely true, I think it is possible to do that. I think it will depend on some very astute programming that is likely to be appealing. I keep saying will sports be shown on it, but I am told that the cost of getting the rights is prohibitive. I can imagine all sorts of ways in which this can be more appealing to people if it has got the right spread, the right cultural mix, and so on. Will the Arab street start off even more sceptical than some of the Arab governments, I think there is a real chance of that. Wherever the BBC World Service has broadcast, I think over a period of time – I hate to use the words ‘ordinary people’ because somehow it conveys entirely not what I want to convey – it has reached those audiences and has finally become embedded in those audiences because of its reputation. I do

think that you make a very strong point about the difference between television broadcasting and radio broadcasting. One of the points I have made consistently to the World Service in the discussions on this project is, are you 100 per cent sure you have got the people who can do television; you have got expertise coming out of everywhere in radio but have you got that expertise in T.V. They are confident they have, they are bringing in people who do look very estimable but I am going to keep asking that question myself, because I think if anybody relaxes on the assumption that you can do television in the same way that you do radio they will fail.

**Q999 Lord Armstrong of Iliminster:** We were told, I think yesterday, that £19 million had been allocated for the development of this new BBC 12-hour service and I have two questions. First of all, I wondered whether you had talked to them at all about the possibility of finding that extra £6 million so that it was turned into a 24-hour service; we gathered that was the extra premium that would have to be paid, as it were? The second point is the point that Lord King was beginning to touch on, are we sure that £19 million is going to be enough to finance this service? There was a reference to the fact that Al-Jazeera is putting something like \$100 million into the provision of an English service. You are going to have to pay for a great many extra people, some of them quite expensive people, in those countries. Would the Government be amenable to the thought that in order to make this successful the funding will have to be a great deal more than either £19 million or £25 million?

**Lord Triesman:** The BBC has put together what looks to be, in my judgment, a pretty robust business case. One of the things that is true about BBC World Service is that it does make use of synergies within the BBC and news-gathering, and so on, although of course it does need specialists in this area and they will be expensive. The synergies are probably a bit hard to cost in an organisation like the BBC, but nonetheless they are there and so I think that the plan looks reasonably sound. The difference with Al-Jazeera is that Al-Jazeera has decided to

be a global broadcast station. It broadcasts 24 hours, it does it right throughout the world, not just in the Arabic-speaking countries. There is quite a high premium in doing that, as we know, with all of the big global broadcasters. That is a really tough business to get into, I think. That is why, in the case of the BBC World Service Arabic programming, we believe that it is right to start with the 12-hour programming and see how that looks. There is a very good, logistical reason for it. If you look at the time zones of the Arabic-speaking world, you can get, roughly speaking, 80 to 90 per cent of most of the hours that people are awake with a 12-hour service. It is a very narrow time zone band. Others may have made this point, my Lord Chairman, to you before, but it is a very significant factor. I think, in justifying a 24-hour service and any additional expenditure, whether it be £6 million or more, you would have to say, "Well, what do you really think audience penetration will be at three or four in the morning in the Arabic-speaking world with a television station?" I think that only solid research, showing that there is some serious value added by doing that, will be needed to convince people to go ahead.

**Q1000 Lord Armstrong of Ilminster:** I can only comment that the Arabs in my part of London, which is near Bayswater, seem to stay up all night already. Could I ask, and you may not want to answer this question, whether the BBC actually asked for more than £19 million to do this job?

**Lord Triesman:** They wanted a 24-hour service; they have that ambition. I must say, to their credit, when we talked about what may or may not be the pros and cons, and there was an open discussion of that, not a sense of giving them a direction but an open discussion of it, they came back with a business plan which, as you know, dealt with various of the language groups and how they were going to generate resources inside the BBC, which indicated that, whatever their long-term aspiration, their recommended position at the moment is the 12-hour and we agreed that was the right way to go. Incidentally, I ought to make this point, and I do

not mean to go on too long about it, there are two features of this, and I do think there are two and they are distinct. The first is, of course, that there needs to be proper balancing finance in order to make this thing work, but secondly that it was worth doing in its own right, that as we analysed it out it was the right thing to do.

**Chairman:** Obviously, things have changed in Government. I have never heard of public spending negotiations being called an open discussion, up to now, in my experience. The Treasury at the end decides pretty firmly which way it is going to be, but we will leave that to one side.

**Q1001 Lord King of Bridgwater:** You said at the start this has got to be well done and it is one of the criteria for the BBC in doing it. With the increased competition there is going to be, it could well be that the BBC find it is rather harder to recruit competent, Arabic-speaking journalists if there is competition for them and that they cannot do it as well as they hoped within the budget that you have agreed. Have you got any ability to ensure that it is properly launched if they hit trouble? Will the alternative be to postpone it, or will the alternative be to give them more assistance?

**Lord Triesman:** I suppose I have not reached towards an alternative, Lord King, principally because, when the BBC have discussed the detail of this, one of the things they have felt very confident about was the quality of Arabic-speaking journalists, who of course principally will come from those countries, they have been really rather confident of that. I think it may well be that the burgeoning of the Arabic-speaking media has generated a very considerable number of competent journalists.

**Q1002 Lord King of Bridgwater:** What, currently unemployed?

**Lord Triesman:** Currently attractable to the BBC Arabic service. I must say that one thing which has to be said about the World Service is that, its world prestige, as such, there is a real

desire, particularly among younger journalists who are very ambitious and of very high quality, a real ambition to work for the BBC, it is one of the great prestige steps on anybody's CV.

**Q1003 Lord King of Bridgwater:** Tell us, because you have not told us this, which hours are the 12 hours?

*Lord Triesman:* I have not got those hours in front of me. Do you mean the British ones?

**Q1004 Lord King of Bridgwater:** You know that it covers 80 per cent of the listening time, so somebody must know the answer?

*Lord Triesman:* Indeed, and I will make sure, my Lord Chairman, that we provide that. I think it runs from something like six hours before GMT to six after.

**Q1005 Lord King of Bridgwater:** Continuous hours?

*Lord Triesman:* Yes.

**Q1006 Baroness Howe of Idlicote:** Mine is a very quick bit of future-gazing. There is clearly a disparity between views about how much this is going to cost to be really successful, but leave that to one side. In its early days, if it is up and going, it is going brilliantly and everybody is absolutely delighted with it on all fronts but it is costing more, what then?

*Lord Triesman:* That is a very tough question and I guess there would be a pretty tough negotiation and the Treasury - - -

**Q1007 Chairman:** Another open discussion.

*Lord Triesman:* The Treasury would engage in that open discussion, I think that is right. One of the things which I hope the BBC itself will continue to do, and arguably could have done a little earlier if they were realistic about it, is continue to review its output and ensure that it is

using the resources that it has as effectively as it should. I am not, in that, hinting at other language closures, the plan we have got needs to bed down and we have got to be confident that it is working but, rather than encourage anybody's thinking, including the BBC, that the first recourse will be to go back and knock on the Chancellor's door, I think there is a key recourse, which is to make sure that, as they were, I believe, they are using all the resources they can, we have in that a sum just under £250 million next year, that they are using every penny of that wisely.

**Q1008 Lord Maxton:** To ask you a question on these costs, the BBC of course already employ presumably a fairly large number of Arabic-speaking journalists on their radio stations; certainly in BBC Scotland the journalists move between radio and television. When you looked at the costs of this, was that taken into account, that presumably some of these journalists would either move over or would be employed doing both parts of the service?

**Lord Triesman:** That was really my point in saying that there are synergies across the BBC and within the World Service. It is absolutely true, there are a significant number of Arabic-speaking journalists already in the BBC. I cannot say, I am not a broadcaster, I have never been asked to put together a programming system of that kind, whether all of those people are sufficiently telegenic, or whatever it takes, and they will have to make those kinds of professional judgments. They do start with a very, very good base resource and it is one which is a very flexible resource, that is quite true.

**Q1009 Lord Maxton:** Which, of course, an organisation like Al-Jazeera did not have and will not have, that sort of double pallium, if you like, in terms of journalists?

**Lord Triesman:** Interestingly, I think I am right in saying that it was BBC journalists, in a former attempt to get an Arabic-speaking service, who were largely the people recruited to be the journalists for Al-Jazeera, so I think Al-Jazeera benefited greatly from the BBC.

**Q1010 Chairman:** I think we have heard that. Can I just sum up, before bringing in Lord Holme. I think one of the concerns is, and you expressed it yourself, that we were behind going into the Arabic service. The BBC is now going to have the authority and finance to introduce a 12- hour service, not a 24-hour service. You may feel that basically this is too little, too late?

**Lord Triesman:** I do not think it is too little. As I have said, I think that is a proposition which will get tested in practice. My strong sense at the moment, having analysed the data that we had, is that the BBC were right finally to pitch at the 12 hours and the period that the Foreign Secretary was prepared to sign off. Is it too late, well, I think not. As I have said, I think that it would have been advantageous to have started this earlier. I think it has still got every prospect of working and I would not be an advocate if really I did not think that, because I have got no desire to see public money spent fruitlessly. I think it could work but I believe it will.

**Q1011 Lord Holme of Cheltenham:** I think one of the very sad things about this development is the fact that, in scraping together the pot of money to do it - and I share the scepticism of some other members of the Committee about whether in the end it will be enough, because this I think is a high-risk enterprise, and the characteristic of high-risk enterprise is, in business, as Lord Kalms reminded us, not just they go wrong but they always end up costing more than you think they will, whether that is the case or not - we see the closure of some services which really have been extremely important in these countries. I happen to know the Czech situation very well and I think this will be a very great blow and I know that a number of leading Czechs already are very sad and worried that the Czech Service will be discontinued. I have to say, for some of the countries, I think it is a bit complacent to assume everything is fine now and the very need that existed originally has disappeared. I think there are real issues in a number of these countries about the nature of

the democracy, the nature of civil society, the understanding of the sorts of values which the BBC represents, and those are very much valued by those who care about those issues, so it is a sad development I think. My concern would be that has been done in the worst possible way, “Oh, gosh, we’ve got to find the money somewhere so why don’t we close down some services and that will pay for it,” rather than being led by the real demands and the real needs of those countries for the sort of service that the BBC World Service offers. I would be really most grateful for your opinion, because when the BBC World Service made this review how far were people with sharp pencils in Government sitting over their shoulders saying, “Oh, you can cut that one”?

**Lord Triesman:** I suppose I have started from some rather different working assumptions, but let me explore them briefly with you. I think that probably there was a convincing argument for a number of years before the BBC did this review to discontinue some of the services. A number of the countries are countries which have joined the European Union recently, they are now well-established, solid democracies, a number of them are in our military alliance, in NATO as well, they are not thought to be at risk in a general sense and one of the characteristics of not being at risk is that they have flourishing media. I know at first hand, and I have seen it with a number of parliamentarians in our own House but also, of course, in the House of Commons, that it is very easy to publish articles with strongly-held opinions on almost any subject and the Czech media is as good an example of that as you could get, it is very open media now in which you can fight out ideas without restraint. I do not think that necessarily we will be adding in some of those countries a great deal of value, and the indications that the BBC took as evidence that we were not adding that much value were that the levels of penetration that they were then achieving were falling to very low levels indeed. In many cases, people were picking up BBC broadcasts in English, in any case, because,

fortunately, many people in continental Europe make much more of an effort to learn our language than we make to learn theirs.

**Q1012 Lord Holme of Cheltenham:** That is probably true of the under-30s but not yet true universally in those societies?

*Lord Triesman:* No, not universally true, but I think that, nonetheless, when we get to these very low levels of penetration and these very changed media profiles in countries there is a different picture. It was perhaps the same decision that is coming round again that was taken about Germany and France in the past. I think it is a pity, in a way, because, of course, there was some very high-quality work and it was done by some very exceptional people, and everyone will feel regret at that, but I think that the regret could be nostalgia now rather than the realities of the contemporary position. I do think it was the right review with the right outcome and it was not to get the money. That review, I think, would have had to take place to enlarge the new media, just to do the work that was necessary to get these new forms of communication with people going, they would have had to think about whether they were using all the money wisely. In the development of new media, I think that is an area where the BBC did grasp the nettle actually, and pretty early, and they have been doing rather well.

**Q1013 Lord Holme of Cheltenham:** Would the BBC, with or without your advice, have discontinued those programmes had it not been necessary to find the money for this new Arabic service?

*Lord Triesman:* I really do believe they would, yes. I think they would have held the reviews that they intended to hold and I think they would have come to the same conclusion.

**Q1014 Lord Holme of Cheltenham:** The worry is, if the gloomy among us are right and the new Arabic service will end up costing significantly more than the present estimates, for

competitive and other reasons, for establishing itself, will we see another tranche of countries brought into the column of “Oh, well, compared with the burning need of having an Arabic service, we can close those down as well”?

**Lord Triesman:** In discussions with the BBC they have said that they want the new pattern to be in. I have said, on behalf of the Foreign Office in those meetings, that I think it is very important that we do not simply go through one change after another without everybody being able to make what we have moved to work. That is the approach we are taking, in partnership with the BBC. I think that if the Arabic-speaking service turns out to be very different we are going to have to think about the whole thing. I do adhere to the point that it must be right for the BBC always to think about whether they can do other things and more efficiently, that would be true in any organisation. I could not say of any organisation they should not do that. I think if there are other big questions, well, they will have to be addressed, and the Comprehensive Spending Round is coming up and some of those polite discussions no doubt will take place.

**Q1015 Lord Peston:** Just as a preliminary, of course I agree entirely, since the individual taxpayer has to use their budget wisely then it follows that public sector institutions should be subject to exactly the same rules. That is not a problem, as I see it, quite the contrary. I should think that the more they are told they can do this and cannot do that really the more efficient these public institutions would be. The fact still remains that one other aspect of this matter is that Britain is a country which has to survive in a very tough, global economic world. As I look at the list of the countries that are before us, several of them, I bet, very definitely, the Czechs, without a shadow of a doubt, are going to be very successful economies in the European Union and I am pretty sure that the Slovaks, the Poles and the Hungarians are also very important markets, where we will be competing like mad, where it is vital that we succeed. My only worry then is has that kind of consideration really had the

weight put behind it that it ought to have had? Really it is not for you at the Foreign Office to tell the BBC “You must not give up the Czechs,” but it just needs airing, do you agree, that one has to think often of these wider issues where, to go back to your point, the image of our country will also help to sell our goods and services?

**Lord Triesman:** I have felt right from the start of my involvement in the exercise that the FCO did need to be clear about what it thought were strategic priorities. This is not to compel people but so that they understand our thinking that public diplomacy delivers the best possible results. You are absolutely right about the economies of some of these European countries, it is also true about some of the big economies in Latin America, and I think that the response to that has been quite a wise one. Firstly, we do anticipate being able to access through English language and that will have a continuing impact. Secondly, there are a lot of broadcast outlets which we have an involvement with, which are not BBC World Service but which we use, and we try to make sure that in view of, for example, economic work together, business opportunities are good, those are all there. Of course, the new media that I referred to a while ago are still going out as very important parts of that and in the business community, of course, that sort of worldwide web networking is tremendously important. All of that is still there. I would doubt that, if one looks at some of the levels of penetration, even in quite dynamic economies, let me choose Poland, 1.82 per cent of the available market, I doubt we were having the impact that, of course, you are quite right, we should want, and so, of course, we have got to find other means. There would not be any point in saying, “Well, we’re not going to do that involvement and we’re not going to do anything else;” we have got to find other means.

**Q1016 Lord Armstrong of Ilminster:** This is a change of subject. In our first Report we recommended that the BBC as a whole should be subject to a regular set of ‘value for money’ reviews by the National Audit Office. That is something that the Government and the BBC

have always resisted, for fear, they say, of compromising the independence of the BBC. Of course, the BBC World Service is already subject to such reviews. There seems to be a difference between licence fee-payers' money and taxpayers' money in this respect. I wonder if there are any fears that the National Audit Office's work with the BBC World Service risks compromising the independence of the World Service, of the BBC?

**Lord Triesman:** You are absolutely right, that the World Service does have, in the six agreed key principles, a requirement to go through an exercise on monitoring and I do not think that any monitoring, whether it is NAO monitoring, and I do not want to guess at what will be in Lord Carter's Report, if there is any notion of there being a general and heightened level of accountability for public money across the public diplomacy partners, I do not think any of those should compromise the independence of the BBC. What I do think the public are entitled to insist upon, that parliamentarians insist upon, is that if people say they are going to do particular things, that is their direction of travel and these are the milestones, they are entitled to insist that they know whether they are going along that direction of travel and whether they are passing the milestones. I think that is the least that the public should expect us to do. I think that we must do that, we must do it in a way which keeps at the forefront of what we are saying, "This is where we're going, we're not telling you what you should do in content, at any stage, in doing it." Those are the distinctions we maintain as our guiding principles.

**Q1017 Chairman:** Does the National Audit Office, in its inquiries, in any way compromise the neutrality of the BBC World Service?

**Lord Triesman:** No, I do not think any of these performance-measuring systems compromise that. I truly do not believe that they do and we must ensure that they do not.

**Q1018 Chairman:** You do not think therefore there is some sort of conflict between the view on the BBC World Service as far as the National Audit Office is concerned and the view on the BBC generally?

**Lord Triesman:** No, I do not, personally. We live in an environment, and I think it is good that we do, where people say, reasonably enough, “What is it you say you intend to do?” and then later say “Are you doing it?” I think that is a perfectly fair question to ask of us, as parliamentarians, or anything. The FCO has to be asked that. I do not think any of us are immune from it. I do not believe that the BBC could point realistically to a single occasion when such a question has compromised their editorial independence.

**Q1019 Lord Maxton:** Could I bring together perhaps two things you have said, one about the growth of the number of people who speak our language, or maybe it is the American language rather than ours, across not just Europe but the world, and of course the new media. Is not the sense that the World Service is not yet irrelevant but that it is being replaced for many people around the world by the BBC website, which gives, of course, a much bigger and broader view of the world than just the BBC’s World Service can give and it gives an impression of Britain which is open, democratic, liberal and has a whole variety of different things going on?

**Lord Triesman:** I think the BBC’s websites, of which, of course, there are quite a number, some of them highly specialist and many of them very intriguing, convey exactly the impression, Lord Maxton, that you describe and they have the added benefit that a number of them are interactive, you can get a discourse through them in a way you simply cannot by broadcasting outward. I think there are real advantages in all of that. It is also true that on the World Service, and at rather better broadcast quality than often you can get through the net, there is a huge range of cultural materials, of things which are deeply interesting and which rely on the specifics of the language that is used and of the music that is played, and so on. I

use this just as an example. I listened to the World Service's material on the development of the jazz of Portuguese countries in Africa, maybe it is something that I am particularly keen on, but I could not imagine either anybody else doing it or it being done if you could not do it with a strong Portuguese element within it. I felt that it just demonstrated how a degree of specialisation mixed with a degree of real respect for the development of music, in this case, in a culture was again a great hallmark of a great broadcaster.

**Q1020 Lord Maxton:** I presume that is available on the website as well?

**Lord Triesman:** It is, and because I liked it so much I went back to the website, which you can recapture at another time of your choosing.

**Q1021 Lord Maxton:** You podcasted it, did you?

**Lord Triesman:** You could not quite hear the trombones and saxophones at the same quality; it just took the edge off it for me.

**Q1022 Chairman:** Just one final question, for information. Lord Carter's Report, which we have referred to a number of times, has been with the Foreign Office; for how long has it been with the Foreign Office now?

**Lord Triesman:** It is still with Lord Carter and I think he is still talking to the principal partners. I think I can say, hand on heart, that the decision about whether he has arrived at the final formulations is wholly in his hands and I just hope that we will see the Report soon. We have been waiting a good time and I know that he is keen to get it out.

**Q1023 Chairman:** Thank you very much. You have been very patient. We are very, very grateful for your replies and for the way you have handled the questions, and perhaps if we have got any other questions we could write to you and put them down on paper. There are one or two which have come up but we may have a few extra. Thank you very much indeed.

***Lord Triesman:*** I will be delighted to do that and thank you all very much.

**Chairman:** Thank you.