HOUSE OF COMMONS

Defence Committee

Oral evidence: Afghanistan – Camp Bastion Attack, HC 830

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- Watch the meeting

Members present: Mr James Arbuthnot (Chair), Mr Julian Brazier, Mr James Gray, Mr Dai Havard, Mr Adam Holloway, Mrs Madeleine Moon, Bob Stewart, Ms Gisela Stuart and Derek Twigg

Questions 1-123

Witnesses: **Lieutenant-General David Capewell OBE,** Chief of Joint Operations, Ministry of Defence, **Mr Paul Rimmer**, Chief of Staff (Policy and Finance), Permanent Joint Headquarters, Ministry of Defence, and **Dr John Noble**, Head, Afghanistan/Pakistan Current Commitments Team, Operations Directorate, Ministry of Defence gave evidence.

Q1 Chair: Order. This is the opening of the evidence session into the attack on Camp Bastion in September 2012.

Welcome. Thanks very much for coming to give evidence today. This has the potential to be a very difficult evidence session, but let us try to make it as easy as possible, from the point of view of witnesses and of the Committee. We appreciate that there are some questions which we will put to you which you won't be able to answer in public for reasons of security. But when you answer, I would ask you to indicate as clearly as you can, please, where there are questions or parts of questions which you can't answer in public and we will pursue those matters further in private.

For the benefit of those who are listening to this, you need to know that there will be a transcript of the private session, but only a redacted version of that transcript will be published. Agreeing the redactions may take some time.

We would all like to keep as much of this evidence session in public as we can, consistent with the security of ISAF forces. Gentlemen, would

you please bear that in mind in answering our questions. When you answer, please answer as much in public as you are able. We share the overriding concern that you no doubt feel that nothing that is said in public should jeopardise the security of ISAF forces. Please remember, however, that we as the Defence Committee of the House of Commons have the duty, on behalf of the British people, to scrutinise what happens within the Ministry of Defence and in our armed forces and, as much as possible, to do so in public.

Having said that, we know, General Capewell, that you would like to start with an opening statement. Unusually, we have agreed to that. I understand that it will take about 15 minutes, but perhaps you could reduce it a little. You need no introduction, but would you like to introduce your team?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: On my left is Dr John Noble from the Ministry of Defence, and on my right is Mr Paul Rimmer from PJHQ, who is my two-star Chief of Staff, Policy and Finance. I am David Capewell, Chief of Joint Operations.

Chair: Over to you.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Thank you for that introduction, Mr Chairman. First, I am very grateful for the opportunity to brief your Committee on this important issue. As the Chief of Joint Operations, I am responsible for the deployment, sustainment and recovery of UK armed forces personnel in Afghanistan. However—and this is an important point—I am not directly responsible for the day-to-day operational and tactical direction in-theatre. This is rightly managed on the ground by ISAF commanders, which is why we hand control of UK forces to ISAF in Afghanistan.

I have been involved with the Afghan campaign in this and other roles for some 12 years. This experience gives me a particular perspective on the events of 14 and 15 September. The attack on Camp Bastion of September 2012 resulted in two US deaths and led to a significant US materiel loss. As such, it demonstrated that a defensive weakness existed in the camp; a weakness that a determined insurgency found and exploited. It is entirely right, therefore, that the attack has been the focus of such extensive scrutiny from ISAF, from the US and from ourselves, and that so much effort has been exerted to ensure, as far as possible, that the same thing cannot happen again.

Before I begin, Mr Chairman, with your permission, I want to honour the two US Marines who lost their lives and the 17 others who

were wounded that night. I offer my sincere condolences to the families of Lieutenant-Colonel Raible and Sergeant Atwell for their loss. I also pay tribute to those US and UK personnel who responded so gallantly to this bold and well-planned attack.

To aid your understanding of how things looked in September 2012, there were 37 UK bases in Helmand province, compared to the five, including Bastion, now. At this point in the campaign, ISAF forces retained lead responsibility for security in Helmand province and were very much engaged in direct combat operations against the insurgents, alongside their Afghan National Security Force partners. It was very clear to the UK commanders on the ground that the focus of the fight was within Taskforce Helmand's area of operations and not in the area immediately surrounding Camp Bastion. Indeed, up to 14 September the Camp Bastion-Leatherneck-Shorabak complex had never been subject to ground attack.

In the days leading up to the attack there were no intelligence reports indicating an imminent threat to the complex. That said, to give context, well before the attack we had implemented a number of force protection enhancements. These included additional patrol manpower, an automated sense and warn capability, enhanced protected mobility, increased flight line security, additional troops to man guard towers and an RAF Force Protection Wing headquarters.

My objective today is to explain in the clearest terms what happened during the attack and to set out all that has been done since to identify lessons and act on them. In this public part of the briefing I will talk in outline about the attack itself. I will also explain the efforts expended by the coalition to learn lessons from the attack and to make appropriate adjustments to the defence of the Bastion/Leatherneck/Shorabak complex. Given the obvious sensitivities about describing in public the details of how we protect our troops, I am grateful for your agreement to a closed session after this. I will use that private part of the briefing to expand on the events of 14 September and how coalition forces responded. I will also be able to talk more freely about the force protection arrangements that existed at the time of the attack and the specific measures we have taken to enhance these arrangements.

So, to context. I now want to address some of the issues that have been raised publicly in relation to the attack. In September 2012 the perimeter line was a chain-link fence with ditch and berm obstacles and concertina wire. Then, as now, a number of guard towers were sited at intervals around the inside of the fence line. However, not all of the towers were manned at any one time. This reflected the assessed nature

of the threat, which reporting suggested was predominantly focused on the vehicle entry points to the complex. Within the perimeter, the airfield was protected by a double-width concertina wire barrier and a ditch abutting the road which runs parallel to the flight line. The area outside the perimeter fence was subject to routine patrols by ISAF troops, with support from Afghan National Security Force partners.

At this point I shall respond to some of the allegations in the press of penny-pinching with regards to force protection. Commanders in theatre have delegated authority to approve expenditure. At the time they could approve individual proposals of up to £500,000 in value. This was sufficient to cover anticipated force protection measures. Following the March 2012 incident, sometimes known as the "burning man" incident, in which an Afghan employee gained access and drove a car on to the runway, a business case was made focusing on preventing access to the runway from inside the camp. The recommended option which came to my headquarters and which was approved prior to the September attack involved enhancing the protection to the airfield through the construction of an additional ditch and berm to prevent vehicle access. I should emphasise that this option was decided in theatre with the support of my headquarters, following the examination of a number of alternative options, including the erection of a fence to protect the flight line. The details of the attack have been briefed and outlined to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Defence and are also well documented in the US accountability review. I will go into further detail in the private session.

I would like to focus the majority of the rest of my opening remarks on the aftermath of the attack. As I said in my introduction, I am keen to help your Committee understand the considerable effort that has been expended by ISAF, the UK and the US to understand what happened during the attack, to identify appropriate lessons and to act on them. In the immediate aftermath of the attack, the commanders of the British Force Protection Unit completed what we in the UK refer to as an operational learning account and after action review, commonly known as an OLAAAR. In terms of ISAF activity, immediately following the attack the American commander of Regional Command (South West) instigated a joint review board. What had been captured in the UK OLAAAR was then subsumed into the Regional Command (South West) joint review board and not subject to any further formal staffing by the UK chain of command.

After the OLAAAR was produced, I decided very quickly that the UK staff effort should be directed to supporting, rather than duplicating, the ISAF review process. I therefore sent members of my own staff to Camp Bastion to form part of the Regional Command (South West) review team.

That review was completed on 24 September 2012. Concurrently, Commander ISAF directed his deputy commander, who is also the UK national contingent commander in theatre, to conduct an administrative review. This was competed on 27 September 2012.

The deputy commander's report concurred with each of the recommendations of the joint review board report, and recommended that HQ ISAF conduct regular reviews of progress on their implementation. The recommendations focused on force protection, command and control, manning, communications and internal personnel procedures. The Regional Command (South West) joint review board was followed by an ISAF supplemental review in December 2012. This additional activity was to ensure that the review took account of an earlier US anti-terrorism and force protection review of the complex. Regional Command (South West) also conducted specific Camp Bastion force protection reviews in October 2012 and February 2013. The ISAF staffing process concluded in March 2013.

On the formal conclusion of the ISAF process, Commander ISAF wrote to his British deputy commander requesting that the UK review the reports with a view to taking appropriate action. This request was subsequently referred to me, with the formal documentation, by the deputy commander at the end of March 2013. Subsequently, I directed that a review be conducted within my headquarters to identify any further lessons to be learned from the existing report which had not already been taken into account—that is an important remark—and any other areas where further investigation was required.

The review team consisted of subject matter experts who, as well as reviewing lessons, looked into what actions had been and were being undertaken to address any identified shortfalls. The review team reported its findings to me on 11 June. It concluded that there was no single causal factor for the attack and that no further lessons could be gleaned from the existing reviews and their supporting reports. It found no grounds, on the information presented in the reports, for any further investigations to be conducted. Following the review by my staff, the Adjutant-General was asked by CDS—the Chief of the Defence Staff—to conduct a review of all documents arising from the attack on Camp Bastion, independent of the operational chain of command. This was with a view to identifying any further lessons to be learned from existing reports which had not already been taken into account, and to make recommendations on any other areas where further investigation might be required.

The Adjutant-General's report was issued on 12 July 2013. The additional lesson he identified was that we must not allow national service sensitivities to override the requirement for clear lines of authority,

accountability and responsibility in the coalition. He made no recommendations for further investigation.

As far as the US process is concerned, the US launched what they referred to as their 15-6 investigation, broadly concurrent with my own review, on 21 May 2013. The redacted copy of their subsequent report was made available on the US Central Command website on 1 October 2013. Those dates are important in the light of the suggestions that our consideration of the US report was hasty. Our detailed examination of the report's findings began in September on the basis of information we were receiving from our liaison staff in the US Central Command, and was conducted in the light of the considerable efforts that had already been expended in increasing our understanding of what happened and why.

We received the classified version of the US report on 11 October 2013. That was immediately checked in my headquarters for any new material. I subsequently provided advice to the Chief of Defence Staff on 15 October 2013, making it clear that it shed no new light on events in terms of lessons identified, and there was no culpable failure on the part of UK forces at Camp Bastion.

Since the attack in September 2012, there have been significant enhancements to force protection at the complex in terms of manpower, obstacles, defences and military capabilities. Operational security considerations prevent a comprehensive list being described in this forum, but they include the deployment of additional personnel, improved command and control arrangements and enhanced base surveillance measures.

I will finish with some reflections. Mr Chairman, I would like to end this public statement with a few personal remarks. The principal focus of coalition forces in Helmand province at that time was rightly on the vital ground in central and northern Helmand. There had never been a direct ground attack on the Bastion-Leatherneck-Shorabak complex until that point. There was no specific intelligence reporting to indicate that such an attack was imminent or even likely. No requests from theatre for additional resources for force protection enhancements had been turned down in the UK in the months prior to the attack.

The attack was significant in scale and ambition. It was carefully planned and well executed by a group of determined and heavily armed insurgents on a moonless night. It is clear that they were prepared to die in the attack, regardless of any physical obstacles they may have faced.

Operations in Afghanistan are complex, dynamic and dangerous. The enemy has a vote. In such circumstances mistakes cannot be ruled out. That is why we have such a comprehensive process to learn the

lessons from an incident and take actions to resolve them as quickly as possible. I have every confidence that sufficient attention and rigour have been applied through the full range of ISAF and national investigations and reviews to ensure that all appropriate lessons from the attack have been identified and acted upon.

Shortcomings in command and control arrangements at the complex have been addressed and additional force protection measures have been implemented. However, we are not complacent. Routine reviews of force protection arrangements at the complex continue, as you would expect. Following the publication of the US review, I advised the Defence Secretary and the Chief of the Defence Staff that there was no reason to alter our assessment; that no further UK action was required in respect of events on 14 and 15 September 2012. That advice has been accepted.

In closing my remarks, I would once again like to pay public tribute to the US personnel who lost their lives and to all who responded to the attack. Their courageous actions undoubtedly prevented greater loss of life and equipment. Thank you.

Q2 Chair: General, thank you. I think the Committee would very much wish to echo those closing remarks. We would also wish to pay tribute to all of the ISAF forces, who do such an incredibly dangerous and difficult job in Afghanistan, some of them paying a very heavy price indeed for what they do. So thank you for that.

During the course of this evidence session we will need to get at a few things. Two American generals have lost their jobs as a result of this incident. They were in overall command but the attack took place in an area of the camp that was subject to British control. There were a number of unmanned towers. The Ministry of Defence agreed a week or so ago that there were 11 unmanned towers. There had been a number of incursions for scrap, or it was thought that they were for scrap. A number of questions have been asked about responsibilities for these vulnerabilities. The question that we will need to get at is whether there was any British responsibility for these vulnerabilities or whether it is only these American generals who should pay the price. Do you want to say anything about that overall question before we get into the detailed questions?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes, I can do. First, I should refer to my opening remarks. This operation is a coalition operation. It has a coalition chain of command, the ISAF chain of command. Those two American generals were commanders of RC South West, and commanders

in RC South West at the time. The whole footprint of Bastion, therefore, in those terms was their responsibility. I absolutely accept that there were British officers in that chain of command but none of those British officers were the direct commanders in the ISAF chain of command. It is important to understand that. This is a coalition operation. We pass control of UK forces—it is called operational control—to ISAF to command the operation. So tactical decisions on the ground are the business of the ISAF commanders.

In so far as the general context of the footprint at the time—so to address the broad question of the towers—the towers were manned from a collective understanding of the threat at the time. There is a military dictum that he who defends everything defends nothing. So judgments were made at the time in accordance with the threat. As I have described—I hope clearly—the threat assessment at the time and the previous evidence of action on the ground did not indicate in any sense that there was an immediate or direct threat to the perimeter from a ground attack.

It is important to get the context of this right. My remark against that is this. I don't know whether any of you can remember back to 2012, but I can. The activity on the ground at the time in the Helmand area, the Sangin valley and in the vicinity of the ISAF footprint in and around northern and southern Helmand was a very high incident rate. Commanders' minds were focused on that. In the private session I want to go into exactly what that felt like, but I think for this forum the eyes of the commanders were on Helmand, Sangin, northern Sangin, lower Sangin and the Helmand river valley where most of the attacks were taking place.

Q3 Chair: And you said that there had never been a direct ground attack on Camp Bastion before and that there was no intelligence that this sort of thing was coming. It shows the limitations on intelligence but does it also show a lack of imagination, in other words fighting the last attack rather than the coming attack?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I don't think I can comment on the imagination of the commanders at the time. What I would say is that there were most certainly shortcomings, which were identified, as you are well aware, in the US investigation. That is why two of their commanders were, in my view, held to account. They were held to account for a range of causal issues that contributed to the vulnerabilities that were discovered by the insurgency. As a result, action was taken against those American commanders.

Q4 Mrs Moon: Before I get to the issue of chain of command and who had responsibility for what, given your recent statements, can you confirm to the Committee that the UK knew nothing about the July 2012 intelligence report of a Taliban attack on a base in Helmand that had been avoided owing to the premature explosion of an IED that killed several of the attackers? Are you saying that the UK knew nothing of that?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I don't know the specific report that you are talking about—there are a thousand intelligence reports, so you would have to be very specific.

Q5 Mrs Moon: Oh I can be very specific about it. It is the one that is repeated several times throughout all the documents mentioned in the US report. If you had read the US report, you would be aware of that.

Chair: He has read the US report, but it does come out on several occasions in that report.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Could you therefore repeat your question?

Q6 Mrs Moon: The US report mentioned several times a failed attack that took place in July 2012, for which intelligence reports were circulated about a Taliban attack that was due to take place on a base in Helmand but had been avoided because there had been a premature explosion of an IED that killed several of the attackers.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes, we knew about that.

Q7 Mrs Moon: And it did not lead you to see that Camp Bastion could be attacked?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I don't believe it led the commanders on the ground to make that judgment. This is a really important point: what I do not do is command that operation from 6,000 miles away. That is why we have commanders on the ground who do that. In my view, the judgments that they made at the time about what was going on were addressed at the right threats, which were the threats to life in the Helmand river valley area.

Q8 Mrs Moon: We understand that the decision about the control of Camp Bastion was subject to a memorandum of understanding that had been signed in 2011. After the "burning man" incident—I do think that that is a horrible description—

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Me too.

Q9 Mrs Moon: It is the one that we are left with, but it is really quite offensive. After that incident, we are told by the Americans that they sought a new memorandum of understanding that would have given the commander of Leatherneck overall control of both their part of the base and the UK part of the base, but that that was turned down by the Bastion, Leatherneck and Shorabak steering group. Who was on that steering group and what were their nationalities? Did the UK representatives on the steering group refuse to ratify and approve the new MOU, and did Permanent Joint Headquarters in the UK play any role in that at all?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: The history of that memorandum of understanding goes right back to the beginnings of when we first established a camp at Bastion, so it has been modified over time. There was a memorandum in 2009 and a memorandum in 2011. The executive steering group had colonel-level representation. Who was on the committee varied over time, but it was colonel-level representation from each of the constituencies of the Bastion area.

As you rightly point out, it was known as the Executive Steering Group. At its time and for its time, I think that that was the appropriate apparatus to make judgments about all sorts of issues inside Bastion camp, from force protection to resourcing, to the management of the airhead—there was a range of coalition issues. Now, was that a perfect system? No. No system is, but that Executive Steering Group looked at and had the authority to make those sorts of recommendations. So the recommendations that they made at the time were collective recommendations and were agreed in theatre. My headquarters would not have played any part in making judgments about that. This will keep coming up today. It is the nature of coalition operations. When you are in a coalition, some compromises have to be made, but there is only one thing worse than a coalition, and that is the lack of a coalition.

Q10 Chair: Why was that memorandum of understanding not signed?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Which one?

Q11 Chair: There was one that was proposed following the "burning man" incident, which the ESG decided should not go forward. Is that right?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I am not sure about the sequence of that. We can look into it but, so far as I am concerned, the 2011 memorandum was agreed by all parties and extant.

Q12 Mrs Moon: That was 2011, but the Americans put forward a new MOU, post-March 2012.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Ah, right—thank you. Post-March 2012, the memorandum of understanding process takes some time. It has to go through processes in-theatre, and it has to be looked at nationally and bi-nationally. That was not extant at the time of the September 2012 attack. It was the 2011 memorandum. So the process to deliver a new memorandum was under way, but not in place. The 2011 memorandum was the extant memorandum.

Q13 Chair: So it had not been rejected?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Not rejected, no.

Q14 Mrs Moon: So when the Americans say that it had been rejected by the ESG, that they refused to ratify the MOU, that is incorrect?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I would have to look at that, because I haven't got the specifics of signature and all that at my fingertips.

Q15 Mrs Moon: Thank you. The American papers say that the chain of command for reporting for the CO of Camp Bastion was to the CO of Joint Force Support Afghanistan and from there to the Permanent Joint Headquarters for support related matters. Were any concerns ever expressed about the force security operations on Bastion that excluded the Americans from voicing concerns about support related matters?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think you should start back with the Executive Steering Group. It was well recognised and agreed that that was the forum that discussed the collective responsibilities for force

protection and other matters in Bastion. Regarding national issues to do with resourcing in the round, I have indicated that the resource thresholds were at £500,000 for in-theatre decisions. There are very few examples of resources that require more money than that, as my colleagues can explain in a moment. I have no evidence whatever that there was any exclusion of any sort.

Q16 Ms Stuart: I am slightly puzzled—do put me right if I am wrong to be puzzled. Given the position we were in, and the position we held, I am slightly staggered that you could not give a more precise answer to Mrs Moon in relation to the memorandum of understanding. Should you have known?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think I have been very clear. The memorandum of understanding that was in place and extant was the 2011 memorandum. To develop the next memorandum takes some time, because it has to be looked at by lawyers and by a range of people in the policy area. That is why it wasn't signed. We had a very adequate memorandum of understanding in place that dealt with this issue.

Q17 Ms Stuart: Could you say a little more, because clearly the fact that the new one was sought indicated that the existing one was not adequate. What were the inadequacies in the existing MOU, which the negotiations for a new one were trying to address?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I would not describe them as inadequacies. Later I am going to show you pictures of how Bastion expanded over time. This is a very dynamic place; it is not one camp that stayed and looked the same through the 12 years of the campaign. It expanded over time. This camp is the size of Reading.

Q18 Ms Stuart: We have been there. I want to come back to the MOU because I am assuming that you have enough on your plate not to do anything unless it serves a purpose. I would not have thought that at that time you would indulge in reviewing an MOU just because it gave you something to do. Presumably, that exercise was to achieve something. Can you tell us what it was trying to achieve?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: It will have been designed to achieve the dynamic review of circumstances that pertained over time. Let me give you an example. In 2011, the camp would have been a certain size; from 2011 through to 2012, it would have grown. Bastion

has increased in size over time. You have seen it; it is huge. Thousands of people exist there.

As the situation on the ground changes, so the threat changes. As the circumstances of national involvement in Bastion changes because forces go in, forces come out, the Afghan footprint there changes, then you have to take account of all this constituency to make sure that no gerrymandering is taking place, and that everybody has a fair share of both the risk and the resources. This is why, and we can show you evidence of why—

Q19 Ms Stuart: So it is a risk and resource sharing?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: It is absolutely about risk and resource.

Q20 Ms Stuart: So would you like to speculate why the Americans use the word "reject"?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think that is an erroneous remark in-theatre at the time. Remember, of course, that there is a lot of emotion in this—

Q21 Ms Stuart: On both sides.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Some of the language being used around this is quite emotional. But I can absolutely assure you that the development of the MOU process is a sensible, measured and balanced process that is examined by a range of parties to determine equity or otherwise.

Q22 Ms Stuart: So would the Committee be right to conclude, because this is quite a key issue, that if the Americans use the word "reject" while you are quite adamant that that is an inappropriate description, in the process of negotiation, which is about resources and responsibilities, the British side was still thinking we were talking while the Americans thought we had already rejected?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No, I don't think that is right. On the committee, the Executive Steering Group, the Americans would have regularly said "No, we don't like that, we reject that" and so would have

the British officers on that committee. This is a dynamic negotiation so words like "reject" could refer to anything.

Q23 Ms Stuart: What is the appropriate sentence to describe that, given that you said you were still talking and the Americans would say reject? What words would you use?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think it comes back to this question of operating within a coalition.

Q24 Ms Stuart: No, that is not sufficient. Could you give me a word that describes that outcome? An MOU is a negotiation. You say we are still negotiating; the Americans say reject. Could you give me a couple of words that satisfactorily describe that state of affairs?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: The MOU was under development, as the 2009 and 2011 ones were developed over time.

Q25 Ms Stuart: No, it clearly wasn't. If the Americans use the word "reject" then they did not think that it was a development, so there is a cognitive dissonance here somewhere.

Mr Rimmer: I can help here. My understanding at the time was that there was the MOU, which was signed in 2011. After the March 2012 incident, that shone some light on some of the command and control arrangements within the broader complex. The Americans raised some concerns about how that was reflected in the MOU, and that was discussed by the Executive Steering Group, but I am not familiar with all the detail and the argumentation at the time. The Americans then raised that up to ISAF Joint Command (IJC), but it got pushed back.

My recollection from the review is that it didn't go any further at the time, and that was one of the points that the American accountability review raised. Having touched on an issue with the MOU, the Americans did not pursue it as far as they might have done. What we can say subsequent to the attack is that that MOU was annulled and the issues that it covers have each been dealt with.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I do think this is an important point of clarification. It wasn't from theatre to UK that that language was associated with. I can now see why you asked the question. This was an in-theatre process to address the MOU. These MOUs are looked at carefully by a number of parties, including lawyers and financiers, to

make sure that they are deliverable from all aspects. They are looked at in theatre. Eventually, after they have been looked at in theatre, they come back for national scrutiny. They are not done quickly, and we would not want them to be done quickly. In the balance against risk and resource, our responsibility is to make sure that they are properly scrutinised.

Q26 Chair: General Capewell, you have described the 2011 MOU as very adequate. So General Bradshaw, the deputy commander of ISAF, was wrong when he described it as sub-optimal?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No, let me correct you. It was described as adequate at the time. Subsequently, there was "burning man" and other incidents. Very honestly, I think in theatre they recognised—I am now describing people's view in theatre—that it was not up to the job. That is why, as a result of all this, ISAF has modified the arrangements in theatre.

I think General Bradshaw's remark that the MOU was short in some areas is absolutely right. I do not deny that. But that is why we have a dynamic process to review it. Remember, these matters are dealt with in theatre. They are looked at in theatre initially, and they are looked at carefully. At the end of the day, the people responsible for bearing the tactical risk are the people in theatre.

Q27 Chair: I am sorry, but I am getting completely confused. It was either very adequate, or it was not up to the job.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Let me correct you. I said it was adequate. It was described as adequate for the job at the time. They subsequently found out, from the "burning man" incident and a range of other incidents, that it fell short in a number of areas. That is a fact of tactical life.

Q28 Mrs Moon: But if it was so short, why was it not ratified by the ESG? You just said it fell short.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: It clearly did fall short. I don't think I can add anything more to this debate. There was an MOU, in the aftermath of an attack it was found to be short in a number of areas and then there was a dynamic process to review it.

Q29 Chair: Presumably, PJHQ and the Commander of Joint Operations comes into some of the planning of the MOUs.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: We only come into it in my headquarters—Paul will have a little more on the policy side—once the full process in theatre has taken place. My job is to resource these issues, if there is a theatre ask to resource it. Remember, this is a coalition operation, where coalition commanders—people properly empowered in-theatre—make judgments about risk and resource.

Mr Rimmer: Allow me to expand on that. The January 2011 MOU was in place at the time of the March 2012 incident. That led some in the US chain of command to ask whether there were shortcomings in the MOU. They clearly had an internal discussion at the joint UK-US Executive Steering Group.

I do not know the detail off the top of my head. I am not familiar with how that discussion went and what precisely the debate was. But the discussion at the level of the joint US-UK committee was not to make changes. The Americans then elevated it to IJC, but they got a pushback from IJC, which is set out in the Bastion accountability review. I believe it stopped at that point.

Q30 Chair: But you are suggesting that at both stages the Americans raised their concerns about the MOU, and then at the ESG it went nowhere, then the Americans pushed it up to IJC, and again it got pushed back. But the only thing that one can say about that is that the Americans tried to change the MOU but the ISAF body rejected it, which implies that it was the British.

Mr Rimmer: Not necessarily. Don't forget that the March 2012 incident principally affected the Americans, so it is not surprising that their review of what happened in that incident led them to look at what the arrangements were. That is why the impetus came from the Americans. But, again, the ESG is a joint UK-US body, and ISAF is a coalition headquarters.

I do not know the detail of who said what to whom and when in those different encounters, but the point then was that, after the attack on Bastion, the MOU was brought up again, annulled and the issues were dealt with separately.

Q31 Chair: It is very easy, I know, to look at attacks like this with the benefit of hindsight. Nevertheless, I hope you will accept that this does not sound good.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: In what sense?

Q32 Chair: In the sense that it does seem that the Americans, having suffered the dreadful consequences of this attack and the "burning man" incident, were trying to change things, but did not manage to get those changes through.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: As Mr Rimmer has described, the UK-US Executive Steering Group attempted to make some recommendations to IJC, which is a coalition headquarters, not a British headquarters—it has got American commanders in it. Obviously, they pushed back because they made judgments about the recommendations. That is for ISAF.

I think that I have just made an important point. Paul has pointed out that the ESG made some recommendations to ISAF and it pushed back. So this is not a UK push-back; this is IJC, which is a coalition headquarters, which has American commanders in it. This question of C2 is the key issue which confuses. There is not a red line to me for in-theatre tactical and operational issues. They have got to be decided by commanders on the ground in Kabul and in Helmand and through the rest of the theatre.

You can see circumstances where a headquarters in Kabul, commanded by an American with a British deputy commander and a multinational staff, would look at all sorts of recommendations. This is a theatre which is dynamic and particularly dangerous in both the south-west and the east, and you can see why in the range of balancing risk against resource, on some occasions, things were pushed back and rejected, because there is not infinite resource.

Judgments had to be made at the time about this. It is easy, as you say, to look at this with hindsight, but people on the ground at the time would have determined to themselves that there were some shortcomings. They would have made judgments themselves about those shortcomings in the heat of battle and had a conversation about them with their higher headquarters. If higher headquarters do not deliver a resolution and do not give you more resource or more permission, then what you have to do as a commander—again, this is an important point—is adjust your own resources and take risks in other places.

It is back to this: you cannot defend everywhere. You have got to decide where your main effort for defence is. I can assure you that, at the time, the way they were thinking was not about the Bastion perimeter; it was about the huge loss of life that was taking place in other parts of Helmand.

Chair: I think that that point is extremely well made, and I am grateful to you for making it with the passion that you just have. If I may say so, diffidently, that has been the most effective thing you have said so far. It was really well put.

Q33 Derek Twigg: I want to pursue this for a little longer, because I want to get to the bottom of it. If I remember rightly, Mrs Moon asked you the question first and I think part of your answer when she pushed you about whether there was a problem with the later MOU—not the 2009 one—and whether that was ongoing, was that you would have to go back and check. Gisela Stuart then asked you some further questions. I am concerned that the senior military does not have a complete handle on this issue and I want to be clear to be satisfied. Can you tell us what General Bradshaw meant by sub-optimal?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes, I can, but first of all I in no sense feel pressed by the hon. Ladies on the Committee. I want to help you and to reveal to you what I know, as a military professional, but I don't know everything—that is my first point. I am not perfect—

Q34 Derek Twigg: Surely you should know whether there was a problem with the MOU being discussed?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes.

Derek Twigg: There was a problem from our side—what was it? One of the key issues was having a single ownership of all the camps—in other words a single leader who had overall responsibility for security. That was one of the issues that was of concern. I'm asking you what you meant by "sub-optimal", and exactly what concerns—if any—we had about the proposed MOU at that stage.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Remember, first of all—

Derek Twigg: I think it is very straightforward.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes. I am very happy with it; it's a straightforward question.

I've spoken to Adrian Bradshaw and I've looked at his report in detail. "Sub-optimal" addressed the range of issues that collectively contributed to the vulnerabilities. As General Bradshaw described, there are a range of causal factors, not one single factor. For instance, it wasn't just the fact that there was little intelligence indication that this was going to take place; it was also about the breadth of responsibility and the resources available. I have to say that, in the aftermath and with hindsight, it's clear that the arrangements were sub-optimal. At the end of the day, that's why two American generals were asked to retire. So do I agree with your point that with hindsight the arrangements were sub-optimal? Yes.

Q35 Derek Twigg: What were his key points? What mainly concerned him? What were the top one, two or three points? You said you've read the report.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I have. There was a range of—

Derek Twigg: No, he must have some key priorities.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I will give them to you. There were 16 to 18 remarks, and the principal ones were about the command and control arrangements—the nature of the way the ESG operated and the availability of some of the resources in the aftermath. I want to emphasise this now, and it will help with this point: as you recall, I said that during this period there were 37 bases in that area. I recall that you looked at Bastion and said, "Okay, is there any intelligence against Bastion? No. Any screaming demands for resources? Does this feel all right at the time? Yes." Now look at everywhere else, where other people are dying and bases are being attacked. In my judgment about what commanders were thinking, they would have been thinking about those exposed bases elsewhere where there was a much greater demand for resources and which they were trying to make better. You can't do everything simultaneously; you have to sequence resource and thinking. Was General Bradshaw right in the aftermath of this to suggest that it was "sub-optimal"? Yes. Did he point to the eventual US conclusion that the two generals failed to unify effort to ensure the protection of Bastion? Yes. I can say no more.

Q36 Derek Twigg: You've said nothing about the person or persons who were then in command of the security for Bastion.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No, there were no personal remarks at all.

Q37 Derek Twigg: Nothing regrettable by those in command.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No derogatory remarks. That wasn't his business. Remember it was called an administrative review.

Q38 Derek Twigg: The second point, which you haven't answered yet, was about the MOU that was ongoing in 2012. Did we have specific concerns about that, and what were they?

Mr Rimmer: I think there is some confusion. There was a 2011 MOU, and that was the one in place. That continued—

Q39 Derek Twigg: A new one was proposed.

Mr Rimmer: A new one was proposed after Bastion—around March 2012.

Q40 Derek Twigg: So nothing happened before the incident.

Mr Rimmer: No. The existing MOU stayed in place. From what I've read on all this, my take is that after the March 2012 incident, General Gurganus raised a concern. That was discussed at the ESG but not pursued. It was taken forward to IJC, and they pushed it back as well. One of the criticisms that the US made about General Gurganus in their accountability review was that he should have pursued that further.

Q41 Derek Twigg: Others want to ask questions, but mine is very simple. You said that it was pushed back. Why was it pushed back? What were the reasons for it being pushed back? It's very straightforward.

Mr Rimmer: Off the top of my head, it's not something I have the detail of, but we can—

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I would have to check, but in public I am prepared to say that I think it was the availability of additional manpower.

Derek Twigg: Maybe you could provide us with that information in addition.

Q42 Mr Holloway: You have already alluded to the fact that in 2012 you had nearly 40 bases across Helmand, of which presumably Bastion was the best guarded. Presumably if this Committee could have been in all 37 of those bases, we could be here for a couple of centuries doing inquiries about what could have been if we had had the right kit in those places. I know that people died and there was an awful lot of damage, but could you characterise it as: Bastion was attacked; the attack was repelled; more could have been done, as it always could be?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think that is a very fair statement about any operation of that sort. You cannot defend everything; the enemy will find a way. What we have to do is to make the best effort to ensure that the enemy does not find a way.

Q43 Mr Holloway: So are you surprised that so much has been made of this Bastion attack, given that there definitely will have been other incidents that we could have spent just as much time on, and probably more? Resources are not infinite.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No, I am not surprised by the scrutiny that you are giving this, because two US soldiers died and the US had a substantial materiel loss. I think it is right and proper for it to be looked at, but you have to place that in the context of all the other deaths and destruction of equipment that have occurred over the time of this campaign.

Mr Holloway: Thank you.

Q44 Bob Stewart: General, two US Marines were killed in action; eight US personnel were wounded in action; we had eight personnel wounded in action; six Harrier jump jets were destroyed; two Harriers were severely damaged; one Sea King had minor damage; and two vehicles and various bits of minor equipment were damaged. That was in an area where the British had responsibility for security. Yet you said that "there was no culpable failure on the part of UK forces at Camp Bastion".

There must have been some failure for that to have happened. I can't quite understand the losses we sustained as allies alongside the fact that there was no culpable failure. There was a breach of the perimeter in an area for which we were responsible, yet there was no culpable failure. Someone must have done something wrong. It would be quite nice to find out, and to suggest that we did actually get it wrong in some respect.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think there were errors made, but they were not culpable errors. I have to point out that the US conducted an investigation to determine whether anybody was culpable and found that two US generals were—they were the commanders at the time.

You pointed out that the British were responsible for an area, but the British were involved and entangled in the whole business of Bastion, so you cannot just isolate it as a British failure. This is an important point. As general officers in command of RC (South West), you cannot abrogate responsibility to other people. I feel that every day. You have to ensure that, in your review of the whole problem—that is the problems in Helmand and the enemy problem against the bases—you take account of it all. Individuals cannot make judgments about the totality—the whole picture. That is why you have general officers.

Fundamentally, at the end of the day, that is why those general officers were found to be accountable, because the causal errors evident in the aftermath contributed to that vulnerability. That vulnerability cannot be put down to a single item that failed. The single item that failed may or may not have had a British officer or serviceman in the chain of command, but fundamentally they could not make judgments about the whole picture. It is the business of general officers commanding in-theatre to make that judgment. That was why the US determined the outcome that they did.

If your question is about service inquiries and all that, there are specific reasons why you conduct service inquiries. First, I cannot disburse a service inquiry. I am not empowered to conduct a service inquiry, because that is a single service issue. In a moment, Paul will explain the absolute point of law on this, but it is clear to me that on the basis that there was no UK death and no UK major equipment destruction, because all those Harriers were US Harriers, there was no prima facie case to conduct a service inquiry.

Mr Rimmer: That is right; I cannot add much to that. There are certain circumstances in which, by statute, a service inquiry has to be conducted, such as following the death of a serviceperson. They can be convened in circumstances not mandated by statute or policy at the discretion of the convening authority. CJO does not have the authority to convene a service inquiry. It was a question throughout, in a sense. As the ISAF review was looked at and people looked at lessons learned, somebody could have decided that they could convene a service inquiry, but the decision was made that the lessons had been learned. As CJO has explained, it was felt that there was no UK person who could be—

Q45 Bob Stewart: I take the point about general officer responsibility and I understand the concept of command very well. The fact is that they were responsible for what happened and therefore fell on their sword—or the sword was stuck in them. But there is also the concept of fault. They were responsible, but they may not have been at fault. My question really is: was anyone else at fault? Was there any fault in the system? It seems that there was. We are not trying to blame anyone, because we know very well that no one sitting here is responsible, actually, but we are trying to find out what happened. We do not even want someone blamed, necessarily, but we do want to get to the bottom of this. At the moment, it seems to be quite obscure; perhaps it will be opened up in private session.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No, I am very happy to say in public that errors were clearly made, or else the enemy would not have been successful.

Q46 Bob Stewart: I think we should establish that point in this session.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Errors were collectively made. General officers failed to attribute and aggregate the causal factors that were becoming evident to them over time on the vulnerability of Bastion. That is very, very clear in the US accountability review. What you cannot do—this is important, because I have been a commander at many levels—in all this is to try to say, "It is him or that," because it is never as clean as that.

These things are always complex and ambiguous, and eventually they aggregate to a point where—they clearly did so in Bastion—vulnerability was discovered by the enemy. The US accountability review was clear in describing those causal linkages and the contextual conditions at the time. I hope I have adequately described the contextual conditions at the time, which were that a violent and dangerous fight was going on in Helmand, which was terrifying.

Q47 Mr Havard: I am glad that you said some of the things that you have said, General, because it is long overdue that someone defended the British personnel who were in Bastion at the time of the activity a bit better than they have been defended in the past. It is about the non-culpability of individuals, so I welcome what you said.

In your statement, you said a couple of things that I want to pursue. While no individuals were culpable, you said that no requests from the UK were turned down. You talked about things that were done within this MOU structure process. You talked about things that were done for the runway and the flight line and so on. Can I put this into the context?

We have a story that the then Secretary of State for Defense is about to arrive in an aeroplane and a new general is on the tarmac, and some disgruntled boy comes and tries to run him over, goes in a ditch and sets himself on fire. The Americans asked the obvious question of how the hell he got on the airfield. We start there, right? That is the "Burning Man" incident that starts things off. The consequence of that, as I understand it, is that the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, which is the Americans, and RC (South West) decide to have a look at this question. Then the UK co-ordination, along with the 3rd Marines and the anti-terrorist force protection officers, submit a project to deal with this question. It says they propose four courses of action and then the report goes black. I don't know what they are; it gets redacted at that point.

We then say that there was a recommended project to do something about it—this is the Steering Group we have heard about—and it had to do with things that affected both: the Americans and us; it is a joint activity. They denied this request on the basis of the cost and time to construct compared with the assessment threat. Later on the generals are sacked because they didn't take additional command action, even though they knew about these things and they should have done something about it. What I want to know is what actually was done. You talk about an internal fence, but I think a lot of confusion comes from people talking about perimeters. There is the overall perimeter and then perimeters within the perimeter. You seem to be saying that they did do something about stopping the vehicular access to the runway and then they made some other adjustments. Were the other adjustments to the overall perimeter defence, or was this again just simply the perimeter of the runway process?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: First of all, you have described in various bits of time and space a range of activities that has led to the conversation around risk and resource in many ways. I shall ask Paul to answer with absolute clarity on the business case proposition that was made to us so that we can reassure you that any out-of-theatre recommendation was serviced properly. You have described the nature of the ESG debate at the time. I don't know which bit of the report you are pointing to that was redacted, but I am certain that in the closed session I can add more light to that.

Q48 Mr Havard: I don't want to know the dirty detail; I want to test the fact that you said no requests were denied, yet it seems from the ground that things were denied.

Mr Rimmer: I think you are right. There is a bit of confusion about the perimeter of Camp Bastion and the perimeter of the runway within Camp Bastion. There are two things there. As you say, with the incident in March 2012, a locally employed Afghan got into a car, got on to the runway and set himself on fire on the same day that the US Defence Secretary was arriving. I was in Camp Bastion on that day as well, in a different place, funnily enough. Clearly one of the issues that arose from that was how we make sure that vehicles don't get on to the runway, either by accident or in a deliberate attempt if, say, someone from within the camp was able to drive a vehicle borne IED on to the runway where clearly there is potential to cause great damage and loss of life. As ever, engineers looked at the proposition. As you know with these sorts of things, there is never only one solution to it. They looked at a number of options. One of the options was doing nothing; other options included different types of fencing around the runway.

Q49 Mr Havard: So one of the four courses of action was to do nothing and there were three others. You have described two so far.

Mr Rimmer: Others included variations on fencing—I am not a fencing expert—and one of the options included digging a ditch and a berm, so putting the spoil from the ditch to one side to make a vehicle barrier. I have looked into the paperwork around this and I have actually spoken to someone who was a member of the Executive Steering Group that discussed it. The conversation in the Executive Steering Group, as has been related to me, was focused primarily on stopping unintended vehicle access to the runway.

Q50 Mr Havard: These are all internal to the perimeter fence where the incursion takes place.

Mr Rimmer: But this is within the camp. How do you have a better control of the runway operating area? Part of this is in case someone within the camp got inside, but also, from a safety point of view, you don't want vehicles getting on to the runway by mistake. Those proposals were discussed by the Executive Steering Group. Their view was that you could meet that requirement not by erecting a complicated fencing arrangement, but by digging a ditch and berm. The cost of that proposal was within the delegated authority figures.

Q51 Mr Havard: Can I ask the question the other way round? Were there any proposals at the same time to do anything about the overall perimeter fence, where the incursion took place? If proposals were put forward to improve it, were any of them denied?

Mr Rimmer: I have not seen any evidence that any proposals for improved force protection were turned down. That particular one came to PJHQ, and it was approved. The US report says it was turned down but, actually, that is not correct. I have not seen any evidence that other proposals for force protection were turned down.

Q52 Mr Havard: So it was not turned down. It was allowed, so that report is wrong.

Mr Rimmer: That is correct.

Mr Havard: Right. I just wanted to be clear about that. Thank you very much.

Q53 Mrs Moon: Can I start right at the beginning? Lieutenant-General, you said heavily armed individuals attacked on a moonless night. I have watched lots of films about cowboys and Indians, and that is usually when these things happen—on a moonless night heavily armed insurgents try to get into the fort.

The first problem it appears we had was that there had been, perhaps, a lack of attention to the fact that two settlements grew up close to the perimeter fence and that individuals were allowed to grow poppy, so they had an excuse to come right up to the fence to tend their fields. There were at least three known incursions into the camp in which the exterior fence had been cut open; indeed, there was video film of people coming through the Bastion fence and even going into the towers.

Let us take things right from the start and work our way through what we could have done, should have done and, perhaps in retrospect, were wrong not to have done. We are told throughout the report that people coming in and out of the camp were seen as "scrappers". Has the UK learned a major lesson in terms of allowing potential access to exterior fence lines, allowing close access to the fence line, allowing incursions through the fence line and failing to respond to known incursions through the fence line? Were we wrong not to have addressed those things?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think that question strikes at the very heart of a counter-insurgency campaign, which is what we are conducting in Afghanistan. It is an excellent question because it describes how difficult operations in those conditions are.

At the edge of the camp, as you were right to point out, there were settlements, but those settlements were not cleansed. Imagine the circumstances in which you would have to find reason to do that. Those people were going about their normal day-to-day business. There was a mixture of criminality and silliness by children, and the last thing we want to do if we find a kid trying to get over a fence is to shoot him or her dead. In the balance of judgment at the perimeter level, you have not only to be absolutely sure that this is a terrorist intervention or an enemy intervention, but to make sure that, in determining that, you do not mistakenly kill an innocent person going about his normal business who may be high on solvents or who may just be mischievous. Some of those judgments are really difficult, and they are encapsulated in the rules of engagement, although I cannot go into the rules of engagement in detail. Soldiers face difficulties every day when trying to come to those judgments about whether or not an enemy threat is real.

The circumstances at the time had these villages close. You are right that some poppy growing was going on, and the terrain was undulating, so the circumstances at the time—this is one of the causal contributions that the Americans identified—made it easier for the enemy to mingle in. You will also know, and I will go into more detail, that the enemy were much more clever than to take a moonless night and choose the hour. I cannot go into the details in this session, but I will show you how clever they were in the private session.

On a daily basis—I am recalling 2012 now—you would have seen people very close to the fence. You would have seen people trying to pinch things from under the fence. As you rightly point out from that video, now and again somebody got through the fence. In those circumstances, on most occasions, the breakthroughs were dealt with more than adequately, because we have killed no children on the fence line. I must tell you, however, that an Afghan soldier was killed on the fence line as he tried to get over it coming back from leave. That is how difficult it is to come to judgments about the fence perimeter.

Now, in the sense of the context of the perimeter, operations were also being conducted in a much deeper sense, further away from the perimeter, that were designed to try to suppress as much of this activity as possible under the terms of the ROE. So the defence of Bastion should not be viewed, in any sense, as about just the perimeter; the defence of

Bastion should be viewed in the complete context of operations at the time.

You will know—again, I can give more detail later—that we conduct operations at range from Bastion fence perimeter to ensure that none of our aircraft are interfered with as they approach the runway at altitude. So when you look at the whole problem of Bastion, you cannot look at it as about only the fence and encroachment. That in itself is a complex judgment for soldiers to make—is this a gangster, a child, a criminal or a terrorist? We can show you evidence of people breaking through the fence and then being arrested, as we have determined that they are just criminals trying to pinch things, and we have reacted adequately through the quick reaction forces available to us.

Choosing the moonless night was a very good start by the enemy, but it should be viewed in the context that I have just described. It was not the sole reason why they were successful.

Q54 Mrs Moon: They were successful because they had a map. They knew exactly where they were going and all those coming close to the fence and standing up on top of the hills outside gave them a clear view of where they wanted to go.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: That's because of the locally employed people inside the camp who come in everyday. It is really hard to ensure that those people, when they go back home or elsewhere—to the marketplace—don't reveal things to somebody who wants to cause damage. That is a constant problem that has not gone away. It will become more and more difficult over time.

Q55 Mrs Moon: General Capewell, I have full sympathy for that, but in a sense, this is a British part of the complex, and Britain had an MOU that said we were in charge there. Coming through all the evidence from the Americans was that we were a bit sharp-elbowed about saying, "This is our bit of the base. We are in charge here—our rules." Having said that, I appreciate that there was the additional problem that the Americans were going a bit softly, softly outside the fence because of the upset that had been caused by the video that had been distributed in the US, so some of the work that would have been going on in the villages was not going on.

But you get through the fence, and the report says that the manning of towers 15 and 17 was inadequate and that it would be a questionable decision to man only those towers. That was for two

reasons: there was no line of sight of the breach, but also—this is really quite significant—there was no rear sight over the area leading to the airfield. So once you got through the fence on a moonless night and once you were past the towers, there was nobody looking for people moving around until you got to the airfield. What is your view, because the Americans have said it was a questionable decision, it was our decision and that it was inadequate? They make quite clear accusations that we were inadequate in our coverage and were questionable in our decision making.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: First of all, you can see the breach near one of those towers, tower 17. The fact that they got in under the wire was really a question of the millilux level and the darkness at the time. It is not a question of line of sight. It is a question of the darkness level. I have to tell you that everybody—every single person—in Bastion is responsible for force protection, because that is the only way you can come to terms with things like the insider threat. If you think that your perimeter is being looked after and is 100% perfect, that is an unsound military judgment, because everybody knows that eventually the enemy will find a way. It might not be through the perimeter. It might be because the man who is delivering the ice cream decides to turn against you on the day.

So when it comes to the question about whether there was a rearward look, everybody in Bastion is responsible for force protection in some way, and I think I have already described to you the fact that we had QRFs—quick reaction forces—able to react if breaches occurred. We have ample evidence of that occurring—for instance, children being arrested and kicked out, or criminals being arrested and then dealt with. So I do not accept that there was no hinterland that was sensitive to this risk, because the evidence is to the contrary.

American judgments about this in the aftermath are easy to make. I have already said that there were errors. I am very happy to say there were errors, but the errors singularly were not the reason why this attack was successful. The errors, when you look at them collectively and when they aggregate to a risk to Bastion protection, are the issue that needs to be addressed. That is why the Americans came to the conclusion that they did.

Q56 Mrs Moon: Can I again take you back? I totally endorse everything you say about everyone having a responsibility for protection. That is absolutely right. But we are talking about late at night when the only people on guard are the guards in the tower, some people watching from overhead—you have some camera coverage—and one mobile patrol

that was somewhere else and totally nowhere near. So the responsibility for the watching was very limited. It was largely down to the people in those guard towers. Yes, the Quick Reaction Force would have been there when they had something to react to, but nobody knew at that point.

The next thing that is raised by the Americans is that the 3rd Marine Air Wing were not integrated in the UK force protection defence plan. So once you were past our guard towers, there was nothing to respond to until an attack took place, because no one was actually doing any guarding. There was another set of razor wire, which they cut their way through. We appreciate that they set off in three different directions, but they managed to do a heck of a lot of damage in an area under our control before the Quick Reaction Force knew that they were there. Why weren't the 3rd Marine Air Wing integrated into that defence plan, and would that have made a difference?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I don't think that the sort of modifications that you are talking about would have made a difference that night. This was a highly professional attack and some of the US reporting suggests that. Another fence or two would not have prevented this determined attack. I know that you have been on the ground, Mrs Moon. Remember that the distance between the outer perimeter and that bit of the airfield is very short in military terms. It is 500 or 600 metres.

Mrs Moon: I think they describe it as 550 metres.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes, 550 metres, depending on which way you look at it. You can get across that sort of distance very quickly. These people were properly trained and very thorough.

To address your point about integrating the 3rd Marine Air Wing and the associated risks, every subordinate commander has a responsibility for his own self-protection. This is why, at the end of the day, Major General Sturdevant was asked to retire because, in the look at this, you cannot rely on everything being perfect. There were internal patrols all the time among the accommodation. They were designed to prevent insider threats. There was the QRF. To suggest that it was simply the perimeter guard towers and the next thing was Harriers on the runway and in crew accommodation, isn't the right way to characterise this because, beyond the perimeter wire, out in the desert, there would have been other patrols.

I can't go into the detail of the surveillance capability that we have, but there was other oversight from surveillance assets. Internal from the wire to, let's call it the concrete, there was very little—it was a short piece of desert. But inside the perimeter in other places, there would have been other patrols—local patrols to make sure that anything from people falling

out of bed to being attacked by insiders hadn't occurred. All that was going on, so I don't think you can characterise this by, "It's just a fence they got through and then they were into the jets." That is not a proper characterisation of defences at the time.

In the aftermath of this, on reflection, was this proven to be adequate? No, it was not. That is why those generals were found to be lacking in responsibility, as the Americans found. They didn't integrate the whole picture, and it is very clear that they should have. But were those errors at the time in minor terms—the fact that one tower wasn't manned and the other was—part of the contribution to this failure? Yes.

Q57 Mrs Moon: Can I have a very straight answer, please? You are saying that the two American generals were sacked because they didn't integrate. Are you telling this Committee that, given the MOU that was in place, they could have overridden and imposed their own defence security system on Camp Bastion? They could have said, "Okay, you Brits have got this plan, but actually we want our Marines on your land. We want our Marines providing this. We want to agree the plan." Could they have done that?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: They could have, but they did not.

Q58 Chair: The report of the Americans says: "The underlying causal factor of the successful Taliban attack on 14-15 September 2012 was the failure of MajGen Gurganus and MajGen Sturdevant to adequately ensure that an integrated, layered defence-in-depth was in place to protect US personnel and equipment on the Camp Bastion airfield, which led to loss of life and damage to mission-essential resources." Is that your view?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes.

Chair: I think we ought to be moving towards the private session, unless there are further questions.

Q59 Derek Twigg: Who was the senior British representative on the ESG?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I haven't got the name of the colonel at hand. I have so many names in my head—I will get back to you.

Q60 Derek Twigg: The Americans make the point in their report that the MOU didn't specify what the protection standards would be. It says that both sides—American and British—would use their own protection standards, but didn't actually specify that in the MOU. Do you think that was a failing?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think it was one of the errors that were made—I think you are right—to standardise the force protection arrangements.

Q61 Derek Twigg: So we have some responsibility for that?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: In the way that the committee operated, you could say that we did, yes.

Q62 Derek Twigg: You made a very big point about how difficult things were on the ground in 2012. Were they more difficult than in any year since 2006?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I am going to show you, in private session, the nature of the intensity of that fight. I cannot do it in public because it reveals other aspects of security.

Q63 Derek Twigg: Yes, but there might be a view that, because we had set a deadline to start withdrawing from Afghanistan, clearly there was an uplift in operations to meet that deadline. Therefore, your argument is that, because there was an increased operational scale, maybe we took our eye off Bastion because of all the pressures elsewhere. That could be one way of looking at what you said.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes.

Q64 Derek Twigg: You touched on something else in answer to Mrs Moon's question. Just to clarify, it was recognised by various people in both the British and American commands that there was concern about the Afghan nationals and subcontractors and what help they were able to give to the insurgents. That was raised prior to this incident. Would you say that they got significant help from inside in mounting this attack, without going into the details?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think there was some leakage of what was going on inside the camp. We have to make that assumption because that is how these people behave, regrettably.

Q65 Derek Twigg: In other words, you agree that there was inside support.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I can only determine it to be so.

Derek Twigg: When I asked the Secretary of State this on 17 September, he said there was not. I just wanted to check it out because I asked him that question when he made his statement to the House.

Q66 Mr Gray: On this general point, of all the things you have seen and done in your 10 years—or whatever it is—of involvement in Afghanistan, to what degree do you think this incident was gigantic, major, significant, or ordinary or insignificant? To put it another way, is it your opinion that we are making a fuss about nothing—a storm in a teacup—or not?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No, I do not think you are making a storm in a teacup. It is right and proper that this be looked at with clarity, for all sorts of reasons. One is that the nature of coalitions requires us to be honest to each other, and getting this out in the open is a good way of describing that. This coalition we are in with the Americans will not end with Afghanistan: there are bound to be other operations that we conduct with our great American partners.

Q67 Mr Gray: Of course. I wouldn't expect you to say that we are wasting our time; none the less, of all the things that have happened in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, is this really a matter of gigantic importance? Surely it is one of many military instances of this kind and not really something that people should be losing much sleep over?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I don't think that this is campaign-changing, but I do think that it is operationally significant and we must address it.

Q68 Mrs Moon: I have a final question. The point was made several times by various people who gave evidence to the US inquiry that the UK Force Protection Wing "did not employ a dedicated security force on the Camp Bastion perimeter. Instead, they relied on a 'camp tax'"

from UK tenant units. There was also criticism that perhaps part of the problem was the rapid turnover of British troops, so there was no longitudinal interest in the security of the camp. With the Brits who were there, you get somewhere with one set, they moved on and you had to start again. That was a second line of criticism. Will you comment on those two criticisms? Do you think they played any part in vulnerabilities on the site?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Not in total. Let me explain. A longitudinal look at this is sometimes a disadvantage. What happens when you put troops on the perimeter is that there comes a point in time when they really begin to lose attention. In many ways, refreshing that is militarily advantageous. It keeps people sharp. While you noted that there was a camp tax, those people who were drawn from that tax were properly trained and put into those towers, so that they had the skills necessary, particularly if they were in towers, to deal with events. Although you can argue that a longitudinal approach does deliver continuity, I can also argue, and my instincts are, that refreshing troops in static duties is a good thing to do, because imagine the circumstances where you are stood in that tower for a long time and you know that you going to do that for a long time. That is not conducive to keeping your interest, but if you are constantly refreshed, that is conducive.

There are a number of ways to skin this, and you have to leave that to judgments on the ground at the time. I do not know what was going through the minds of the commanders at the time, but in aftermath, and looking at it, I think there are pros and cons to that approach.

Q69 Ms Stuart: My memory may be playing tricks on me, but when you made your opening statement, I think that you concluded with some personal remarks, and then you went on to say that you gave the advice to your superiors and the Secretary of State that there was no fault, and you stand by that. At that moment, I thought, "Here's a man who is about to fall on his sword." Was I wrong to think that?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Was I about to fall on my sword? Oh goodness me, no.

Ms Stuart: Okay. I just thought that I would check.

Q70 Chair: Just before we move into private session, is there anything else that you would like to say in the public session, perhaps defending what the British have done, perhaps explaining anything or perhaps reiterating the point that it is easy for us armchair generals to

criticise in hindsight, but once you are in the heat of battle, things look rather different?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think I would just make two remarks, which concern the question that I know is out there about requests for additional resources from the UK. It is not the case that the UK, in the shape of the PJHQ or the wider Ministry of Defence, turned down a request for additional resources. I just wanted to make that clear.

Q71 Mrs Moon: Could you be clear—is that resources in terms of manning, or resources in terms of a fence line, or both?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Both.

The other remark that I would like to make, and I will continue this theme in the private session, is that I think if you took a temperature at the time of this attack on where people were really worried—I have been to that theatre countless times, and I am going there over Christmas, and it is my job to take a temperature to see where the level of risk is—they were worried about indirect fire attacks—mortar rounds coming in—they were worried about being blown up on the road as they went about their business, and they were worried about insider threats, where somebody whom you thought was your friend turned out in an instant to be your enemy. From that atmospheric, I think that you can determine that, in any sensible person's mind, that is sufficient to distract commanders, who were trying to come to terms with all these threats. The fact that they got through in Bastion was not preceded by any intelligence warning, but the attack was delivered by a very, very professional enemy, and I will show you how professional in the closed session.

I guess I should also reflect on my final remark in my written statement, which is that I would offer my condolences to the American families who have suffered loss, and pay a tribute to the gallant act of those people who prevented further loss, both British and American. When I show you the nature of this, you will see how brave they were in taking on a very professional enemy, who were also high on solvents.

Chair: General, Mr Rimmer and Dr Noble, thank you very much indeed. We will now move into private session. I would therefore ask the members of the public to leave. I am instructing the broadcasters please to stop broadcasting.

Resolved, that the Committee should sit in private. The witnesses gave oral evidence. Asterisks denote that part of the oral evidence

which, for security reasons, has not been reported at the request of the Ministry of Defence and with the agreement of the Committee.

Q72 Chair: We will finish by 5 pm.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: This will take, I guess, about 15 minutes if you allow me to go through it. You can then ask questions.

Thank you for moving into private session because there are some sensitive issues that require a little further explanation. Clearly they will be either coalition-sensitive or enemy-sensitive, which is why I have asked for a private session.

First, before I go to the slides, the question of the MOU is clearly an issue to you. We will write back to you explaining exactly the circumstances surrounding the development of the MOU. It did get a bit confusing about which MOU and at what point. I would just emphasise that the MOU in question, which was in development, was turned down by ISAF and the intermediate joint command. It was a chain of command rejection, not a UK rejection. We will come to that with a written note.

I know you can all see the screen but, if you cannot read the screen, it might be helpful to refer to the slides as I go through this. Let us begin.

My agenda is to go through the following. I will look at the command and control and talk a little more about Force Protection responsibilities and why that is difficult in coalition. I will then remind you about the intensity of the fighting, which will pick up a couple of questions on where commanders' eyes were. I will then address what the enemy threat looked like. Next will be the "burning man" incident. I absolutely recognise the pejorative nature of that statement, but that is what is in the public record. I will then explain what Bastion has looked like over time—I know you have been there once or twice—so that you can get a feel for the absolute complexity of this. Then I will show you how thoughtful and clever the attack was. Next I will look at the sequence of reviews that have taken place to absolutely address the question of whether there was enough investigation.

Next slide, please. That slide, in itself, reflects upon the nature of the ISAF command and control, so that is the NATO command and control. From the top of the slide, the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers in Europe, through Joint Forces Command in Brunssum, who have overall oversight of theatre activity, through the commander ISAF, his British deputy commander, into the intermediate headquarters, which is ISAF joint command, and then down through the chain of command into

Regional Command (South West), where there is a British deputy, into the Marine Corps and into the US Marine Security Force.

So that, I think, to anybody on the street looks like a pretty straightforward chain of command, and in many ways it is. But then, if you go to the next slide, you superimpose on it all the other different constituencies that a coalition command and control demands. In many ways, Eisenhower was right: coalitions are very difficult, but the only thing worse than a coalition is the absence of a coalition. I think this is why there are always compromises. History is replete with compromises that have to be made in coalition. When you superimpose the constituent parts of this—and this is not the full detail, it is just to give you a wave-top view of how complex the command and control arrangements were—it really does speak to the question, when you look at the left-hand side of the box, why a steering group was required to make sure that the risk and resource question across all the constituent parts of this architecture was taken into account. So that is just to give you a sense of the complexity of the command and control.

Q73 Mrs Moon: Before we move on, which way do you want to do it? Do you want to do the whole presentation and then we ask questions?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I'd rather do the whole thing because there is a sort of fluency to it.

Mrs Moon: That's fine, I just wanted to be clear which way you wanted to do it.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: The next slide looks at the Force Protection activity and who was doing what to whom. The black line is clearly the whole of Regional Command (South West) and, principally, the star with the one is the fact that this was commanded at Regional Command (South West) level. You may have seen phrases in some of the reports that talk about Task Force Belleau Wood and the marine headquarters, and you can see the location of that inside that black line—it is now the purple line—where our Expeditionary Air Wing was in star 3, where the US Marine Headquarters Group were in star 4, and where the Marine Air Wing were in star 5; note the vicinity and proximity of where that breach occurred. That just gives you a sense of geography to highlight the size, first of all, and then the nature of the constituent parts.

Next slide. Before September, as you have quite rightly questioned me on, a sequence of MOUs were in place. The 2011 MOU replaced the 23 September 2009 MOU, but it absolutely describes the nature of the NATO command and control and the national arrangements that underpin that.

The national arrangements were expressed through the Executive Steering Group so that as far as is possible, and it is the last bullet on the left-hand slide, coherent Force Protection was delivered. It was overseen by the principal bodies therein.

That MOU has now been annulled and, in 50:50 hindsight, the determination of the accountability review supports this; there is now a very simple line of responsibility to Commander RC (South West). *** still with Executive Steering Groups, but I think this addresses that point that you very clearly made about, could he have done something differently. Of course he could, and this slide addresses one of the things that was delivered in the aftermath.

The next three slides really do come to terms with—and it is why in public I was so strong yet so reticent in detail—the nature of what was going on in Regional Command (South West). That slide makes the point, first, about the number of kinetic events at ***, and it shows the nature of them. It is my point about people being more worried about direct fire, indirect fire, IED explosions. It is the nature of the events and the number of casualties through that year that were out there.

The bottom left describes the variations in district terms about the number of events in those districts. I think you can see where Bastion is placed. I will come to another slide in a moment that absolutely highlights why commanders' eyes may have been focused on the ***, rather than worrying more ***. That is my judgment in aftermath; it was clearly different at the time. *[Interruption.]*

Chair: I am afraid we are going to have to go and vote. I am sorry. Let us hope it is only one vote. I will suspend the Committee for 10 minutes.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Picking up where we left off, when you have a brief look at the casualties you will see that they are high.

I want to put this in context of where the UK fight was, and on the next slide you will see how offset Bastion is to the level of incidents that were taking place. I think this really does explain in close-up detail why people were not absolutely focused on Bastion as a firm base, but were focused on the nature of operations up the Helmand valley and where the incidents were.

I think the one that reveals this best of all is the next slide. When you look at this, it shows you security incidents—it is not anything about casualty, but is about just any incident. The red dots are in the Helmand area and the yellow dots are in the Task Force Belleau Wood area, which is clearly the area of wider coalition responsibility. The graph on the right shows you the absolute difference between the level of incidents close up—in Task Force Belleau Wood it is the low blue line—against the level of security incidents in the rest of Helmand and other districts. So it does really draw out this point about what commanders were focused on.

Next slide. *** which is a constant irritation; and some form ***

Now the assessment is prioritised differently. *** So you are a commander, and you have got so many geese biting your leg that you just do not know where to apportion the first boot. I think that is right, because all my judgment about this theatre is that *** That is where the threat assessment looks today.

I thought next I would show you this question about Bastion and how it has grown over time, but before that I just want to get to the "burning man" incident and draw out to you how that affected thinking at the time. I am now just going to make sure that this is in the right order in your slides.

Chair: We have that.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes, you have the "burning man" incident. Good.

You can see where the "burning man" incident took place. It took place during the US Secretary of Defence visit and highlighted a number of vulnerabilities to the flight line, not the perimeter. It was looked at, as Mr Rimmer has described, and we endorsed their requirement to put that best effort fence and berm in—*[Interruption.]*. Ditch and berm. That was done before the September incident. The project commenced on 24 August 2012 and was completed on 22 October. It is also useful to point out the relationship with the "burning man" incident, across the other side of the runway, in a different place to the fence.

I think the next two slides really do show you—and it really refers to your earlier questions about the constituency of who was interested in their own security and why, and why there was an Executive Steering Group. On the first of this pair of slides, you can see the size of Bastion in 2006. I remember it; I was there. It was a dirt strip, a simple camp—this was real expeditionary operations. Before 2012, a number of additional enhancements were made and they are annotated there on the slide and were certainly reflected on in my public statement. But there was quite a

lot done to enhance the force protection prior to 2012. The *** is a good example of the technology we were beginning to apply between 2006 and 2012.

Next slide. This really does show you how big and complex Bastion has got; the constituent parts of it; the Afghan constituency of it; where this all expanded in terms of runway development; and the level of people now committed to the force protection effort in Bastion.

I am nearly there. I have just a few more slides, to give you time for questions.

I now want to really show you how clever and professional this enemy attack was. My first point is that, ***, we know they were trained in Pakistan; that planning had begun— *** and that they had managed to ***, so their operational security was very, very good. They had a detailed understanding of the Bastion layout. I recall your conversation about what the Secretary of State said, which was correct, but my judgment, in the aftermath of this, is that there must be some leakage here. They were heavily armed and they understood exactly the layout of the Bastion Camp.

They had no escape or recovery plan and that tells you something as a military. They were absolutely prepared to die on site in this attack, so it was, for all intents and purposes, a suicide attack. I think the diagram on the right hand side shows you how they got in, where they made their penetration—I know you have seen this on the ground—and the nature of the geography of Bastion surrounding that.

Next slide. I said they were high on drugs, but they were also in US uniform. So, Mrs Moon, this points to your question, "How could you have determined, in the middle of the night, even if you saw them, whether they were enemy or friendly?"—and they had got US uniform on. The green mark on the face of that enemy soldier, who was clearly killed, is evidence of drug abuse. That is what happens when you have used drugs and you die. It gives you a real insight into the nature of this. Also, you can see that they were not old men.

As you have rightly pointed out, there were three approach routes. You can see that from the red dotted lines from where they mounted this attack ***; they knew what they were after. You can see as well where the UK and QRF operation to stop this getting any deeper into Bastion was successful. It was a very good and gallant action to get to those determined soldiers, who were clearly prepared to die. Regrettably, this

slide also shows where those brave Americans—very brave Americans—died.

Next slide. I guess the point that I have been trying to make throughout is that if I thought that there was nothing to learn from this, we would not have made some changes in the aftermath collectively as a coalition and from some of our national perspectives in terms of lessons learned. What has happened since then—I think you have seen this on the ground—is that command and control has been unified. ***

Next slide. This speaks to the nature of the reviews that were conducted. I think there is an impression publicly that we have done this lightly and have not considered it in detail. I think it is worth while looking at it from right to left. As the US accountability review developed and as it went through its drafting, we had insight into it with people in CENTCOM, and as it was developed in terms of the redaction process, a number of UK reviews were taking place at the same time. I was very clearly directed by CDS to determine whether there were any more lessons learned or there was anything in the new US reporting that caused me to be concerned about UK responsibility in any sense, and you have seen what is in public on that.

There are a range of other reviews and reports that took place before any of that took place, and you can see the nature of how they developed over time, from September through April, in terms of the constant look at this to make sure that lessons learned had been captured and we had learned something from it.

The result of all that is very clear, and it is on the next slide. Generals Gurganus and Sturdevant were accused of failing to take adequate force protection measures. The report in the Bastion accountability review is very clear. *** They were addressed for lack of defence in depth and for integrating the patrolling at their level, so this is a command-led issue that general officers are responsible for—not individual constituent parts, but a command-led issue that general officers are responsible for. All those causal factors contribute to why this vulnerability was discovered by the enemy.

There were also some contributing factors, which the report is clear on. There was the question of underestimating the enemy—never underestimate the enemy. There was the lack of overall unity of command and effort—General Gurganus did not deliver—and the lack of adequate command direction and oversight. In the aftermath of this, it is very easy to see these allegations for what they are, but I think at the time he would have been under lots more pressure for other reasons. The report is clear. They passed the report to us to determine whether we

could learn anything else from it. You know our position and you know my position, because I am very sure about this: in terms of the commanders on the ground, there was no UK culpable failure on the part of UK leaders in Bastion.

I hope that has been swift but thorough for you. I think in the round this tells us something about expeditionary operations and the command and control of large sites like this. This campaign is unique, in the sense that Bastion was built from sand in 2006. And it tells us something about the nature of coalition operations. We have learned something about that as this place has grown over time and become more complex and as the threat has changed over time and been very dynamic and very violent, as I have pointed out. It tells you something about the nature of how challenging getting the right command and control in place is.

I think I have covered the difficult nature of the fight in 2012 and how it has modified over time into the fight it is now, in 2013, in which we are showing much less flank on the ground. By "flank", I mean we have many fewer bases there—there are five—and Bastion has been insured against another attack of this sort. But I should point out that you should never underestimate the enemy's capability or his intent, and his intent is to do damage. His intent is to spoil the strategic narrative that we have successfully delivered the Afghan campaign *** Sixty-eight young men and women have died while I have been in command in PJHQ, and I think about it every single day.

Base force protection over time has been improved, as I hope I have described. I think it is also obvious that we have taken due care and consideration over all the reports. I have illustrated how wide ranging they are and how deep they are to demonstrate that we have been responsible in terms of making sure that there is nothing else to learn from this, so that in the round, we do our best—and we can only do our best—about protecting people for the last year of this campaign.

Q74 Chair: General Capewell, thank you. Can I go to the slides? The ISAF command and control chart is secret.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: It is.

Q75 Chair: Why?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Because it describes the nature of the relationships. I, of course, don't own the security classification of that

slide. This is an ISAF slide and they own the security classification of the slide. I can't declassify it in those terms.

Q76 Chair: Okay. The next one, on coalition command and control, is also secret, but the one on force protection activity is not secret. Is that just an oversight?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: It may well be printology. It's— *[Interruption.]* Apparently, the whole pack has to be classified.

Q77 Mr Holloway: You said at the beginning that no requests for added force protection were received in the UK in the run-up to the attack. Did any Brits express any concerns to Americans or anything of that sort? I just wondered why you used that particular line.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I used that line because in the formal process of, first, ensuring that the proper delegations were made in theatre—the £500,000 delegation to disburse resources, which was more than adequate in my view for the projects that were necessary—there was no formal request beyond that, through the chain of command back to me. The only one that was made was a request that we endorsed.

Mr Rimmer: I looked at this in detail and had a look at business cases that came through. Force protection is a constantly evolving thing. There is a whole range of business cases, most of which are dealt with in-theatre and have never had to come back to PJHQ—

Q78 Mr Holloway: Sorry, I was just trying to determine whether we had commented to the Americans or something. It was just the way that was worded. The other question is this. You were talking just now about how another attack might damage the strategic narrative around this campaign. What is the strategic narrative around this campaign?

Chair: That is not—

Mr Holloway: It is completely relevant to this. He spoke about how another attack would damage the strategic narrative. Therefore, what is that?

Chair: No, that is not relevant to this particular inquiry. It may be relevant to our overall presence in Afghanistan.

Mr Holloway: He could have answered in the time you took to do that, but okay.

Q79 Mrs Moon: Can I get back to the MOU again—sorry to nag on about the MOU. You started by saying—I may have misheard you, because we were all getting into our places to start again—that the MOU had been turned down at the ESG, but was still in play. What was your understanding in September at the time of the attack? Was the MOU request from the Americans to change the 2011 MOU to a new one—which gave them, in their eyes, overall control of Bastion, which they felt they did not have under the 2011 MOU—dead in the water and out of play or was it still operational? It is said several times it was turned down at the ESG. So, was it in play or not?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: The 2011 MOU was extant. The 2012 was in development. On a variety of occasions—I think I've been clear—the commanders in-theatre in ISAF Headquarters turned it down and rejected the development of it, for a variety of reasons. I am sure in my own mind, and my colleagues will no doubt add to this, that there was an extant MOU that described the force protection arrangements and protocols that ran through until the new one was in place, and the new one was never put in place because it was "in the system".

Q80 Chair: You said "for a variety of reasons", implying you knew what they were.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I was speculating. I wasn't in that conversation on a daily basis because it was an in-theatre matter.

Q81 Mr Havard: Can I ask you what their demand was? What did they want the new MOU to look like? Madeleine is saying that they seemed to suggest that they wanted this overall control, whatever that was. What did they want? What was the change to be?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think they had learnt something from the "burning man" incident, in the dynamic approach to this. It wasn't the cause célèbre of the moment, you know; this was a staff process that was taking place alongside all the other activity that is going on in a base that big, and in a fight that was difficult. These things happen in an iterative way. You can't capture the issue on a daily basis. There would have been a negotiation about this MOU going on around all the other activity that was taking place.

Q82 Chair: You don't know what the exact demands were?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No—

Mr Havard: Maybe he does.

Mr Rimmer: If I can, Mr Chairman, I am just looking at one of the released documents from the Bastion accountability review, which talks about General Gurganus having arrived, the 2011 MOU was in place, and it sets out the arrangements, the boundaries, between the US and UK sites, and that Gurganus, after the March incident, questioned it.

Mr Havard: Yes, "I think we'd better have control of all of this because we don't trust them bloody Brits—get on with it!" Is that what he said?

Mr Rimmer: If you look at the slide that describes the pre and post arrangements, under the existing MOU you had those C2 arrangements, which, on reflection after the attack, were found to be sub-optimal, in DCOM ISAF's words. My understanding of this particular criticism of General Gurganus was he raised it, it was discussed within Bastion by the Executive Steering Group, and as we said earlier I am not familiar with discussion and the arguments they had at that level. It was then raised to ISAF level—ISAF Headquarters level—but they pushed back against it as well.

Now, the second bullet on the left hand side talks about command exercised under existing NATO and national command arrangements. My recollection from reading the accountability review is that part of the pushback was, "No, this is how ISAF C2 is run, there's no need to change." Part of the criticism of Gurganus was he let it rest; he didn't pursue it any further.

Q83 Mr Havard: But is that what he wanted, and is that what we've done eventually that ISAF were resisting in the first place?

Mr Rimmer: I am not familiar with the detail of exactly what he asked, but eventually we've moved back to this.

Q84 Chair: But you will come back to us on that?

Mr Rimmer: We can come back to you on that.

Q85 Mrs Moon: If there is one thing that this side of the tables does understand, it is votes in a room and how to ensure that you've got

the votes. So, the ESG: how many votes in the room and what was the breakdown of those?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Soldiers do not understand votes in a room. There were two colonels—a US and a UK colonel—who would have had a discussion. If they could not have come to a compromise, they would have referred it further upwards. As Paul has described, Gurganus then attempted to get some of the issues into the DNA of ISAF to make progress. He was pushed back.

Mr Rimmer: The ESG did not operate on votes. There might be half a dozen or more US and UK—

Q86 Mrs Moon: Were there only two people in the room?

Mr Rimmer: No, there were a number of officers from each side—up to a dozen or more in total, depending on the issue at hand.

Q87 Mrs Moon: It still comes down to how many people were saying yes or no. And if we had more votes in the room, we would have carried the decision.

Chair: That is not necessarily the way that it works. *[Interruption.]* I am afraid that we all need to come back after this Division. I will make this a seven-minute adjournment, until 17.08.

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

On resuming—

Lieutenant-General Capewell: May I clarify the point about the Executive Steering Group? It is not a political committee or a voting committee; it is a steering group that operates under military terms and conditions. The two colonels, at the end of the day, can decide between themselves what they find valid and not valid. In the circumstances of the time, Gurganus tried to take forward the issues we have been discussing to IJC and ISAF. He was turned down—Paul will give a bit more detail about that in a moment.

But that committee was not convened like this Committee—it had variable geometry. Its size depended on the issues and the agenda. It ranged from 17 in one example, with a range of rank as well. It was not like a voting committee. Two colonels took on an issue and determined

whether they were prepared to agree or not agree. If they did not agree, it was raised to the general in charge, and the general in charge then made a determination to take an issue forward or not. In the instance that you are referring to, the ISAF chain of command turned him down and told him to think again.

Mr Rimmer: I have just been looking at the executive summary that the Americans produced of their accountability review. Paragraph 16(b)(i) talks about the March 2012 incident. At that point, Gurganus, learning of the MOU, felt that the C2 structure violated Marine Corps doctrine and that therefore something needed to be done about it. It was elevated to the ESG, which turned it down and elevated it to IJC—ISAF Joint Command—and ISAF Headquarters, which is a coalition headquarters headed by an American general. It pushed back and told RC (South West) to work on a different command relationship, but not the same one that Gurganus was doing. Again, the criticism on this particular issue with Gurganus was, "If you weren't happy, you should have elevated it even higher."

Q88 Chair: Might it have been a Marine Corps issue—the isolation of the Marine Corps from the rest of the United States Armed Forces?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think that is hard to judge. I know you know the history of the Marine Corps and I know you know that it sees itself as having an entirely separate mandate and different terms and conditions, which goes right back to the Pacific campaign. Mark Gurganus tried it once and he was told to go and think again. In the aftermath of thinking again, he didn't make a louder noise—that is clear.

Q89 Mrs Moon: I still can't get past this. I assume that all the Americans in the room would vote whichever way he wanted. If he wanted something they would be with him.

Chair: I don't think this is a voting business.

Mrs Moon: Even if not a literal, physical vote—

Lieutenant-General Capewell: It strikes me that members of the Committee are confused about two things. First, the ESG is not a voting committee; it is a committee of soldiers and airmen who get together to discuss issues. If they cannot find agreement, they elevate it or they carry out the orders that they have been given. It is straightforward.

Secondly, I don't think we should separate the US and the UK here. The commander of that operation in RC (South West) was an American

Marine Corps general. He was also the coalition commander. He worked to a US commander—a four-star commander at the time—who was also the ISAF commander. That is the point I showed you on the chain of command slide. There are no ways of going round this. There is a chain of command, and if you don't have a chain of command in the military, you die.

Chair: It is not really a voting entity.

Q90 Mrs Moon: I appreciate that, but I still don't understand why, if Gurganus had overall control, which you are saying he had, over Bastion, Leatherneck and Shorabak, he couldn't overrule the MOU.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: The MOU put together all sorts of other arrangements. I was not sat with Mark Gurganus at the time, but from reading the evidence, it is clear to me that he saw something, thought, "We can improve on this," and took it to his boss. He took it to the headquarters of his boss, and he made his representation. He was told that his proposition would not fly and to think again, and he took that back. The point of criticism is that when he took it back, he did not re-attack on that issue and make a bigger thing of it. I guess—I am emphasising "I guess"—that the headquarters in ISAF would have said at that point, "He's gone back and rethought this. He has reallocated resources and there is no longer an issue." That is the way things are in a dynamic campaign.

Q91 Derek Twigg: General, to summarise this in my mind, what you are saying is that because there was the senior ISAF officer there in the camp—the camps, whatever you want to call it—he took ultimate responsibility if anything went wrong, although the memorandum of understanding said clearly that the Brits had responsibility for security at Bastion and the Americans at Leatherneck, etc. That was very clear in the memorandum. Would you disagree with any of what I just said?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: You are trying to account the responsibility in a different way from me. There is the collective responsibility that a commander has.

Q92 Derek Twigg: I just want to be clear. The memorandum very clearly said that the Brits had responsibility for the security at—

Lieutenant-General Capewell: In certain sectors of Bastion.

Q93 Derek Twigg: So it did not say all of Camp Bastion then.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Certain sectors of it, because there are points where it interfaces—

Q94 Derek Twigg: So it was even more confused. It was not actually just Camp Bastion, but certain sectors of it, so it was even more confused. Okay. But the American had to go because, basically, he had overall responsibility. What it does say in the actual report is that he went because he underestimated the threat posed by the enemy's capabilities and failed to achieve the coalition unity that was necessary to deal with this, etc. My question to you: did any of the British commanders raise any concerns about security at Bastion?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: To whom?

Derek Twigg: To command. To you. To your command.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Not to me, because they were abiding by the protocols of coalition chain of command.

Q95 Derek Twigg: Did they raise it with the American general?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: They would have raised it on a daily basis.

Q96 Derek Twigg: No, did they? I am asking not would they, but did they? Have you got evidence?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think there is always a conversation of, "We're a little concerned about this."

Q97 Derek Twigg: Have you got evidence that the British commander—the person who was in charge of Bastion, or parts of Bastion—or his deputy raised concerns about the future threat, or the security of their part of Bastion?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I would be very surprised if he did not raise concerns.

Q98 Derek Twigg: I want to be clear. So you don't actually know, Sir. Could you find out for us and let us know?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes, I think—

Q99 Derek Twigg: Okay. The final point is just an interesting one in terms of security, because we know where the attack took place. It says in the report that we—the Americans; ourselves—allowed the poppy fields to creep up to the perimeter fence. Was not that a sort of an amateur mistake?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: It depends if you determine that the people who are growing the poppy are in any way a threat.

Q100 Derek Twigg: Doesn't the poppy grow to a certain height?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Of course it does, yes. If you are asking me whether I think it was a minor tactical error to allow that poppy field to grow—

Derek Twigg: Minor.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes, minor, because it was not the wholly contributing factor, as I have pointed out. It was a minor contributing factor to the enemy's success.

Q101 Derek Twigg: Is allowing such a thing to happen not indicative of the sort of complacency that existed?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I think in the circumstances of COIN—in a counter-insurgency—you have to be sensitive to the well-being and industry of the people who are trying to conduct their normal business outside the camp, so you cannot—

Q102 Derek Twigg: Would you have allowed it?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: It depends on the circumstances at the time.

Q103 Chair: If a decision had been taken to reduce that poppy field, whose responsibility would it have been to take that decision?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: That would have had to go in to the local shura, because in a counter-insurgency, of course, this is the civilian leadership lead. There would have been a very clear view expressed, I think, if you had asked the provincial governor or the man in charge of the village to take that poppy field down. There would have been a reaction. These things are very difficult in counter-insurgency. You cannot preclude people—

Derek Twigg: You said it moved closer. In other words, it was not there originally. It was allowed to develop up to the fence.

Q104 Ms Stuart: I am slightly puzzled. Given that one of the more irrational decisions that the UK Government made was that we were going to eradicate poppy, I find the "well-being" of the local population a curious expression to use, in terms of allowing them to grow poppy even closer to the fence. Were we not supposed to eradicate the wretched things?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: That is other Government Departments' business, not mine.

Q105 Ms Stuart: I may be barking up the wrong tree completely, but I was struck by something you said in the public session. You made an extremely valid and important point: when things go pop all over the place, you focus on the things that are going pop all over the place rather than on the bits that are meant to be all quiet. However, going through the two slides on Regional Command (South West) fire from 2012 and Taskforce Helmand fire from 2012, I am really struck by the fact that the pattern is almost the same in terms of the breakdown of the kinetic, particularly that, roughly speaking, *** That does not show me a picture of something going more critical in one particular bit. The whole thing is up.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: That is true. The intensity of the operations at the time was very high. What this doesn't describe, of course, is the nature of those specific attacks. It shows that if it's an IED attack, ***. Although it looks like that statistically, what changes every day is the nature of how these attacks are executed. You cannot say, "Ah, tomorrow there will be an IED on the following road." There may well be an IED tomorrow, but where it is put, how it is put, at what time it is put and how it is hidden changes every day.

Q106 Ms Stuart: But it was the fact that it is Regional Command and Taskforce Helmand—the pattern seems to be the same.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes, because the pattern relates to where the enemy populations are. Remember that this is an insurgency. You do not get insurgents simply living in the desert, or they would be easy to get to; the insurgent hides in the population.

Mr Rimmer: The other point is that Taskforce Helmand is part of Regional Command (South West), so it is a subset of the bigger picture.

Q107 Ms Stuart: Exactly. That is my point and that is what makes me ask the question. In the opening statement, you seemed to indicate that the reason why we did not focus on Bastion was that some other bits of the region were going critical, but the graph does not seem to show that. It may just be that the stats are misleading.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: This is my personal judgment about this and I have said it before and will say it again: every day, as that graph indicates, there was some form of attack or incident going on, whether it was an IED or IDF—indirect fire—attack, a close-quarter attack against troops on the ground or a sniper, those things happened in the Helmand area where the population was. They did not suddenly pop out of the desert, or that was certainly not the history of the analysis.

Ms Stuart: I may have been barking up the wrong tree.

Q108 Mr Havard: I interrupted Derek earlier on, but he was making a point about what the Brits had and had not said, and whether there was any evidence that the Brits had raised issues and so on. Presumably there was at least some sort of record or outcome list for the ESG, or of matters arising for their next meeting or something. Is there anything that shows that the Brits were asking for certain things or making particular arguments?

Mr Rimmer: Certainly there are records of the ESG meetings. I have not been through them all.

Q109 Mr Havard: That would answer the point that Derek was making—had things been raised in some fashion? If that was the forum in which they should have been raised, is there evidence to show that, over a period of time, they were raised?

Mr Rimmer: I am just looking at the business cases. Over the months preceding the attack, there were certainly force protection cases being put up for improvements here, there and all sorts of different places. So from my perspective—I am a civil servant, not a military person—force protection was clearly a live issue and something that was continually being addressed.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: This is why it is so important—my job is to ensure that the delegations are properly made. This is why £500,000 was the delegation that we had delivered to theatre, so that when they came across something, they could expend in-theatre to make the right improvements.

Q110 Chair: But there was no mention of what had happened in the ESG in any of the British reviews, such that you felt it necessary before coming in front of the Committee to look at what the ESG might have decided.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No, because the chain of command, and I keep making this point—the way to deal with issues in-theatre is to use the chain of command in-theatre, and when that was not satisfied, and if it was not satisfied, I would have been told that there was an issue. And I was not.

Q111 Mrs Moon: If we can move forward to security incidents, can I just be clear: what are the boundaries that we have here? You have got a little arrow going down into the corner of the blue shape, which you say is Camp Bastion. Is the blue shape the whole of Camp Bastion?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Let me just look at the slide more closely than on that screen. Yes. So the little blue area, Mrs Moon—you can see it says "TFBW"—is Task Force Belleau Wood. *** So that is Task Force Belleau Wood. That sits inside the wider—so the blue area is Bastion. Can you see that?

Mrs Moon: Yes.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: The black area is the big Task Force Belleau Wood area of operations. And then the black line with all the red bits inside it is the Regional Command (South West) area of operations.

Q112 Mrs Moon: Okay, so the blue bit is Bastion, yes?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes.

Q113 Mrs Moon: The majority of the attacks are taking place at the bottom, if you like—in that bottom corner.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: You cannot characterise these as attacks and that is why we have used—

Mrs Moon: Well, security incidents.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: This could range from a carjacking to somebody punching a policeman. It could be anything.

Q114 Mrs Moon: Right. But is that the Bastion site or is that the Leatherneck site? I am just trying to get a picture of where all the security incidents were.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Which site are you talking about?

Mrs Moon: Were they on the Bastion side of the camp or the Leatherneck side?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I see what your question is. Are you asking me whether the yellow dots at the south of the blue area are in the southern area of Bastion?

Mrs Moon: Yes.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes, they are.

Q115 Mrs Moon: So the majority of incidents were around the area where the British had control.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: The majority of incidents were where?

Mrs Moon: Are all these yellow incidents taking place along the area where, inside the fence, the British had control?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No. I just need to be clear about this. These are incidents that could be a man who is falling out with his

neighbour, and that then requires an Afghan patrol. So this is the whole range of incidents. It could be a car crash. It could be somebody killing his neighbour. So this is not attacks, it is incidents—

Q116 Mrs Moon: I am not suggesting it is. I am asking where, in a sense, the critical incidents that are so critical they are recorded are taking place. Are they largely around the part of the camp where Britain had responsibility for force protection, or were they up against the area where the Americans had—

Colonel Fox: That part of the perimeter—at that south part—is, yes, I would say from looking at this slide, within our area of responsibility. But I think the point, as the CJO is making, is the issue about—when you say "critical incidents", these are security incidents.

Q117 Mrs Moon: I appreciate that. I just wanted to get it clear in my head before I went on to the next issue, because what it does tell us is, surely, if you have this many security incidents—albeit they can be a man having a fight, a disagreement between individuals, a carjacking, or anything—it shows us that areas of tension and security concern were largely focused in the area where we had responsibility.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No. This looks beyond the wire. This could be IDF. I can't live with the contention that there are some security incidents, and so you can say that we are responsible for them. They are outside the perimeter of Camp Bastion, of course, because they were in Task Force Belleau Wood, so this is local policing. The majority of instances the red dots describe are not there. They are up the Helmand valley.

Mrs Moon: You are missing my point—

Q118 Chair: The point to get at is this, I think. The main concern of some members of this Committee is that this incident happened in an area under the control of British forces.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No, it is under coalition control. It is Task Force Belleau Wood.

Q119 Chair: Yes, but this area was surely where the British part of the coalition was.

Colonel Fox: Task Force Belleau Wood, which as we say was ISAF, was responsible for that area of operation, which was all around the outside of Bastion. If you're asking about the perimeter element, or in other words which part of the perimeter we manned and was used by ourselves, then it is correct that we effectively manned the area from that southern point up around on the eastern side to the north. We were responsible for that perimeter.

Q120 Chair: That is the sticking point. The block that is in the minds of several members of the Committee is that we manned the perimeter, but the Americans lost their jobs.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: No, because I have already pointed out that Task Force Belleau Wood is a coalition operation. The whole of Regional Command (South West) is a coalition operation. I agree that if you are suggesting that the bit of the fence where the yellow incidents took place was manned by British towers, then yes, that is right. But is the fact that there were some incidents there sufficient indication to say that there would be a very professional attack against that fence at that point? No, I contend that that is not the case. The reason why that attack occurred is because the enemy are clever. They got *** they used a moonless night, they had been trained in Pakistan for a long time, and they got through a range of levels of defences—like onion skins—to defend that perimeter.

Q121 Derek Twigg: Was that part of the fence, which you've just accepted was manned by British service personnel, in the part of Bastion which the British were responsible for under the MOU?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: That part of the fence line, yes.

Derek Twigg: That is in the MOU.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes.

Q122 Mr Havard: The other part of the problem is beyond the perimeter fence and out into the Belleau Wood extended area. You talk about a ***, and there are *** beyond the fence. So there are Brits out in that area, maybe an *** or whoever. There could be all sorts of people—I don't want to know—who are in that area doing that *** and whatever it is, roaming about *** and so on. So there would be Brits outside the fence as well as inside the fence, as part of ***. Is that correct?

Lieutenant-General Capewell: Yes, absolutely. The reason for the operation in the Helmand valley and Sangin valley, where all these red dots are, is to *** so that it doesn't leak out anywhere else. That's why so much effort is put into the Sangin-Helmand population centres to prevent this leakage. Those yellow dots describe incidents, and they could range across the whole landscape—from breaking glass to throwing a grenade. It's that sort of range. The fact in and of itself that those dots are there—and the report is clear on this—did not suggest in intelligence terms that an attack of the nature of the one that occurred was going to happen. There was simply no intelligence leading to that.

Q123 Chair: We will have to draw this to a close. In doing so, I would like to thank you very much indeed. You have been as open and as helpful to the public scrutiny of this as you could have been. We are grateful to you for answering a lot of questions in the public session as well as in the private session. Sometimes we have felt a bit frustrated, but I dare say that sometimes you have as well.

Lieutenant-General Capewell: I guess you will see me again, because it's me who will turn the lights off on this campaign.

Chair: We are pleased about that, and we have already said so in a public report. Thank you very much.