



HOUSE OF LORDS

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The Select Committee on Sexual Violence in Conflict

Inquiry on

SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN CONFLICT

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Heard in Public

Questions 18 - 25

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10.15 am

Witness: Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on
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Members present

Baroness Nicholson of Winterbourne (Chairman)
 Bishop of Derby
 Baroness Goudie
 Lord Hannay of Chiswick
 Lord Sterling of Plaistow
 Baroness Warsi
 Lord Williams of Elvel
 Baroness Young of Hornsey

Examination of Witness

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison, former Chief of the Australian Army (via video)

Q18 The Chairman: Good evening, General Morrison.

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: Good evening.

The Chairman: Thank you very much for joining us. We are very grateful to you. This is a formal evidence-taking session of the Committee, as you know. We will take a full note, which will be published and put on to the public record. We will also send you a copy of the transcript so that you can put in corrections.

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: Okay. Thank you very much.

The Chairman: The session is on the record and is being webcast live, so it will be accessible on the parliamentary website. As a further point, we would very much welcome any written evidence that you might want to give us after the session is over, which we will incorporate as supplementary evidence. Before Members put questions to you, would you like to make a few introductory remarks? You have an extraordinarily varied and interesting background that is closely related to the topic that we are researching.

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: I have concluded a thirty-six and a half year career, which has provided me with a wonderful opportunity to serve with both Australians and the soldiers of great allies such as the United Kingdom. I have seen military forces provide so much a force for good. I know that there is a lot of concern, and very appropriate it is too, not just about the levels of violence in the world at the moment but about the targeting of women and children—marginalised individuals within conflicted societies. There is much debate about the role of military forces in protecting those marginalised societies and how they can best do that.

Without doubt I have come to realise during the course of my career, and certainly during my time as the Chief of the Australian Army, that there is a level of targeting of women and children that builds on the barriers and hurdles that women face in many societies around the world in both developed and developing countries in both secular and non-secular societies. We have now reached a point where, in the so-called enlightened world of the 21st century, we are seeing violence perpetrated against women and children by military forces as well as, of course, by other organisations at levels that you have to go back

centuries in history to see. It calls into question, at least in my mind, what we can do about this.

My own view was that, despite the Australian Army's proud record of being a force for good in so many parts of the world throughout a century and a quarter, we had cultural problems in our own organisation that needed to be addressed. As we started to approach those cultural issues, it shone a light on where Australia's military needed to work as part of a collaborative effort of like-minded countries around the world to ensure that our military forces and the personnel who make up those military forces are best prepared to deal with the type of conflicted society and the circumstances that they may face when they are deployed by their sovereign governments. I will leave it at that.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. I am going to call Lord Hannay to put the first question from the Committee.

Q19 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Good morning, General. I should perhaps explain that I was the British representative on the Security Council at the time of some of the peacekeeping operations that I would like to ask you about. What lessons regarding the response to and the prevention of sexual violence in conflict did the Australian Army learn from its role in Cambodia and East Timor as peacekeepers and its engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan?

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: The Australian Army, like the British Army, is a highly credible national institution that is derived, in Australia's terms, from its constitution and, in the United Kingdom's terms, from that extraordinary long history of being a force for good. I have worked with the British Army in operational theatres and I had two years in the early part of my career as an instructor at the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst, so I had an understanding of how much time is spent preparing officers and soldiers for the role that they may play in military conflict.

Nonetheless, my own experience in East Timor certainly—and perhaps to a lesser extent in Iraq because we were in Almatana province, a relatively quiet section of Iraq—and then reinforced again in Afghanistan, was that the preparation of our soldiers for operational service needs to focus as much on cultural, including gender, issues as it does on what you would describe as the traditional military preparation for conflict, because the role of Australia's soldiers in Cambodia, East Timor, Iraq and Afghanistan, similar to that of the British Army, has largely focused on issues of human security. If you are going to work within conflicted societies, you need to have an understanding of their culture, but you also need to be able to have access to as much of that conflicted society as you can. Of course, an overwhelmingly male force, as is the case with the British Army and the Australian Army, will struggle in environments such as East Timor, but particularly in Islamic countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan, if they do not have the means by which they can interact with that conflicted society, and with 51% of that conflicted society: the women.

We have looked to United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. Australia is certainly a signatory to it. I do not know if the United Kingdom is, but I envisage that it would be. We have drawn on a number of areas of detailed study and analysis, plus training scenarios that are provided under that United Nations Security Council Resolution, to target the preparation of soldiers for the types of work that both the British Army and the Australian Army are still doing now in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Thank you very much, General. I can confirm that Britain was a co-sponsor of that Resolution.

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: Of course.

Q20 Baroness Warsi: Good evening, General, and thank you for everything you have done for the PSVI, which was led by William Hague. I do not normally offer flattery, but you were one of the most impressive speakers at that conference and I know that the whole hall appreciated what you had to say.

I will ask a question that takes us to a slightly different place. What is your experience of sexual violence having been alleged to have been used by armed forces such as the British Armed Forces not in areas of conflict but as a means of interrogation? Do you see a distinction between allegations such as those and allegations of sexual violence that are committed on the ground on the civilian population?

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: Thank you very much for your kind words. It was one of the moments of my life to be part of that global summit in London. I am not sure about the resolution of the screen at your end, but I blushed when you said what you said.

I am not entirely certain that I understand your question. I have no personal or operational experience of any acts being perpetrated by either Australian soldiers or British soldiers that would give rise to any cause for concern that they were not conducting their military operations with anything less than a very appropriate regard to the ethical basis that they needed to have. It was certainly my experience in East Timor that sexual assault and sexual predation had been committed against the women of Timor-Leste by militia elements that had given rise to the social insurrection which the international force was deployed to correct. I have no personal knowledge in countries outside East Timor of sexual assault being perpetrated either by British or by Australian forces, but of course I am aware as a student of contemporary military operations as well as history that women in particular, but also children, have been targeted, sometimes as part of a deliberate military strategy to achieve a questionable but nonetheless dramatic military end, which is largely the cowering and subjugation of a civil society. I would throw the question back; I do not quite understand what you want a specific comment about.

Baroness Warsi: Let me try to clarify the point, because perhaps I did not make myself entirely clear. Do you have any comment to make on allegations that have been made and are in the public domain of where armies, including what happened in Iraq, have been accused of using sexual violence as a means of interrogation once combatants have been captured during a war?

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: Other than to observe that if it is done it is done in contradiction to any number of United Nations resolutions and laws of armed conflict that have been agreed to by countries such as the United Kingdom and Australia—that is, the norms that have established the societies that we all enjoy—I know of no particular instances at first hand. I did not serve in Iraq or Afghanistan, so I could not offer any comment on them. I would simply offer the view that I expressed in London two years ago: that there is a deficiency in the way the international community, and indeed sovereign governments, pick up on allegations of actions such as those that you have spoken about and deal with them either in the International Court of Justice or domestically. This is a problem that I think we all face now.

Q21 Bishop of Derby: Thank you very much for speaking with us. You said something in your introductory remarks about the cultural issues that you have dealt with within the Australian military. You are well known for your campaign to tackle gender discrimination within the Australian Army. Can you say a bit more about how that work translates to being more effective on the ground in terms of tackling and trying to prevent sexual violence in conflict? Can you say a bit more about the relationship between those two things as you see it?

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: Certainly. This is a personal journey in some respects of discovery and, I guess, introspection. Because I had stewardship of the Australian Army during a period of leadership, it was something that I had not necessarily expected when I began my appointment as the Chief of the Australian Army in June 2011. I thought that I had been well prepared. I have been a soldier for a very long time and had operational service, and I have dealt with major budgetary, capability and development issues, as well as all the human interaction that is actually the cohering force in militaries. I came to understand, though, as a result of independent inquiries into the treatment of women in the Australian Defence Force that were conducted by Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Miss Elizabeth Broderick, that there are two ways of looking at these incidents. One was to see them as a series of actions by rogue actors who behaved outside the rules that govern military forces, and which looked depressingly like the actions of rogue actors who had done exactly the same thing months or years before. You could see them as isolated incidents that you could somehow draw a tenuous line between. I think that is the way that many leaders, including me up to a particular point in my life, view these matters; they see them as just the unfortunate recurrence of individuals who display the worst traits in human nature. Or you can see these incidents as systemic flaws in an otherwise strong military culture that has cohesion, which tear at the heart of what you want as a military; it is supposed to be a reflection of your contemporary society, but it also has to be the protector of the long-term security and prosperity of the country.

In Australia, that realisation was a fairly dramatic one for me. I am not sure how familiar you are with Australian military history, but the Australian Army is a great national institution. When I speak to corporate entities, as I do on a very regular basis, I say, "Your brand is good but my brand is just as good if not better". The captains of industry roll their eyes and laugh, but then I point out that the army's brand is founded on names like Gallipoli, Alamein, Tobruk, Kokoda and Kapyong and, for us, Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan and East Timor. It is rooted in the hundred thousand names that are on the roll of honour on our Australian war memorial. That tends to shut up the captains of industry.

The point, though, is that the culture is largely the stories that we tell ourselves about ourselves. So if you have a military that tells itself stories that are exclusively male, exclusively Anglo-Saxon in my own country's case, and based on the idea of a roughhewn country boy who fights best with a hangover and who never salutes officers, especially the Poms, you have a culture that is largely exclusive in the tales that it tells itself about itself. What does that say to women? What does that say to Australian men and women who are not Anglo-Saxon in their heritage or Christian in their beliefs? It says very little other than that someone probably does not fit the stereotype of our culture and therefore there is either no or a limited place for them. I have my critics in this view. I have my critics within the military, although not all that many any more. I also have social critics here in Australia. But I believe that I took the right step at the right time and that I probably found a different way of describing the issue. I then searched for the language to convince my overwhelmingly

young, male, Anglo-Saxon workforce that I had not lost the plot. I went back to the plethora of analysis that has been done in the corporate world that shows that a diverse and inclusive workforce is indeed a more capable workforce. That logic applies as equally to military forces as it does to a mining industry or an investment bank.

Bishop of Derby: Can I just confirm something? I understand you to be saying that that reshaping of the culture to be more inclusive and diverse presumably equipped it better to understand issues of inclusivity and diversity in the cultures in which you were serving where there was sexual violence.

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: People do not do things for your reasons; they only do them for theirs. Like a very long line of senior British officers, we in Australia had dealt with instances of sexual predation, sexual assault, bullying and harassment largely by appealing to the better aspects of human nature and largely finding the logic in altruism. I guess that I have been knocked around enough in life to no longer believe that that altruistic argument necessarily cuts through with young soldiers, so we found a different argument. We found a language based on capability, and there were instances when I used that when I was speaking to soldiers, particularly around the idea, "If you are in Afghanistan, East Timor or Iraq, what are the reasons for your being there? They are largely to do with matters of human security, and if you cannot speak to over 50% of the population because of cultural taboos, how are you going to be the most effective military force that you can be?". That sort of argument does not switch lights on readily, but I think it has more traction with young soldiers than does appealing to the idea of a fair go or behaving with respect for your colleagues. Of course you have to have an education campaign that is founded in values and the proper approach to ethics, but you also need to focus on the fact that young men, and women of course, join a military force to be soldiers and to do things: to be on operations, to represent their country. If you can demonstrate that you are approaching these matters to make them more capable, you are much more likely to have them start to do things for the reasons that they also believe in.

Bishop of Derby: Very helpful, thank you.

Q22 The Chairman: General Morrison, has the work that the Australian Army done on gender equality impacted on the troops from other nations with which the army serves?

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: I am not sure whether it has in operational theatres or not. I am probably not qualified to give a view on that, but I would offer what I think is the relatively objective view that the approach the Australian Army has taken has certainly garnered a lot of international attention. I have spoken in a number of countries now, both while I was Chief of Army and subsequent to it, on the approach that we took and why we think it started to cut through. The last thing I would do is offer you the view that in the space of four brief years we went from a troubled state to one of perfection; we are a long way short of that, and I am sure that the current Chief of Army would agree with me. But we did make a significant inroad here, and a lot of statistics now tend to show that we have been successful. We have attracted many more women to join our army. We have increased our numbers by almost a thousand in the space of only a couple of years. We have put female soldiers and officers into positions of authority that have been denied them in the past largely as a result of gender issues in the past. Without turning the screw on the British Army, from the last count I think we have seven times the number of female brigadiers in the Australian Army than you do in the British Army, yet you are still the much

larger army. While those can only be seen as examples, and you are absolutely right to step back and look at them from a number of different perspectives, none the less we seem to have made a significant difference. My argument is that we have become more capable as an army as a result.

Q23 Baroness Goudie: Good evening, General. One of the things that I feel is very important in all these aspects is how we measure success and how we are successful. Do you have any thoughts on how we should measure the issue and how we are trying to cope with it?

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: The first thing that I did at the instigation of the Sex Discrimination Commissioner was to consider the idea of setting a public target for increasing the number of women in our army. It did not take me long to decide that that was the right thing to do at the time, in early 2012, so I named a target for the next two years, which we got to by the way. Now, 2% does not sound like a very big increase, but when you are dealing with a permanent force of over 30,000, 2% is an additional 660 women, as it was for us, joining and being retained in our army. That was important because it was a very tangible and easily measured target that you could chart some progress by.

As I came to understand it, though, there were many broader issues. It was not just about the number of women in the military, it was about incidents of poor behaviour, incidents of inappropriate use of alcohol, incidents of the use of non-prescribed medication or drugs, instances of bullying and harassment, how we dealt with them, and the length of time that we took to deal with complaints from soldiers, both male and female, about inappropriate behaviour. All those were then captured, analysed and trapped, and on every measure—from memory now—we showed improvement, and where improvement was slow it allowed us to come back and to start to ask why. You can talk about these matters until the cows come home—to use an Australian expression—but it probably will not move anything forward, except in the most ad hoc fashion. If you have data that you can chart your progress by, you can certainly see where the effort is working and where further effort needs to be applied.

So we took as best we could a fairly scientific and hard-headed approach to this, and I think it was a successful part of the steps that we took.

Baroness Goudie: May I ask a further question? Once you have a percentage of women in the army, how do those women, when they are out in combat working on the ground, combat sexual violence in conflict by those who are on the ground?

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: It is my view, and I think it is supported by a considerable body of evidence gained from decades of analysis of military operations, that if women peacekeepers are present, and certainly present in sufficient numbers, the level of sexual violence committed against marginalised women in conflicted societies is reduced. It is reduced not only by the military forces that are present but in the context of the broader society. There are pretty straightforward and logical reasons for that. Women talk to other women about their concerns for their safety and well-being and for the safety and well-being of their children. That provides military forces that are there to provide security for those conflicted groups and societies the opportunities to take practical steps. If you are listening only to the men, you are getting only half the picture. That is well understood, and I do not think that any student of military history would debate that point. If you are there to protect populations, you have to have access to all the populations.

Increasing the number of women who are overtly there in a combat or combat-support role also has a very telling effect on the military forces that are present, and these operations are often undertaken as part of broader coalitions. Indeed, the army of the United Kingdom has a proud tradition in this. It opened up areas of military service to women long before the Australian Army did so. You can look at the strong performance of the British Army and the army of the United States, but also of course Canada, Australia, New Zealand and many other countries that have embraced as best they can the idea of more opportunities for women in military roles, and you see the impact that they have. My rather simplistic argument is that we need to keep doing more of that, because not only are we then providing a better level of security and safety for the women in the societies that we are there to protect, we are also performing in our own right as military forces more effectively.

Baroness Goudie: Thank you very much. That is really helpful.

The Chairman: We have another 10 minutes of your time, General Morrison, for which we thank you. I turn now to Lord Sterling.

Q24 Lord Sterling of Plaistow: Good morning, General. I was going to begin by asking whether you could give us some advice on how to play better rugby, but perhaps that would not be a very good start.

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: You really do need to give me credit here, because I was not going to mention it. For all of being the stereotypical Australian, I was going to let that one flow as quietly as the waters of the Avon, so we might just leave it there.

Lord Sterling of Plaistow: I have an Australian colleague and we have both decided that we will not talk about cricket or rugby.

I have colleagues in the armed services, particularly the army, who I am sure you know well, such as Peter Wall, who stood down a couple of years ago as Chief of the General Staff, and then obviously we have Nick Carter and General Messenger. I am sure you all share the same views, ideas and approach to conflict, but I want to remind us all that this is about conflict as against some of the individual acts that some people do which they should not do, and which we all know about.

I have a two-part question. This is not just about the UK but about the NATO forces, because after all they are the critical force as far as the West is concerned. Number one in a two-part question, is there any single area where you would have a strong view or advice to give on what might be an improvement in how NATO forces behave?

Could I also come back to the view that when you talk to people like Peter Wall and Nick Carter, we are talking about how front-line troops behave, not the clerks and others behind them, in the excitement, or whatever you want to call it, of action? Noting your experience in East Timor, you commented earlier on how some of the militia forces behaved. How can one deal with the long-term and ongoing problem of those who are considered to be the rebels, the other side, the instigators, IS or whoever it might be?

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: Perhaps I can take this by answering your last question and moving back sequentially to your first. I am not sure what you can do about rebel and militia forces. The actions of ISIS take us back to the barbarity of the 7th century. I

take a straight military view here. If you cannot convince them, you need to remove them from the equation, and however you do that is obviously done within the parameters set by democratically elected Governments and the rules of law in the international community. It is hard to conclude that anything other than the very same base human attributes that drove rape in war before the birth of Christ are still evident in certain sections of human society today, and I am not sure what you can do with it. I am a student of history, but I have no blinding insights into how you change human nature. I do think that you need to have military forces that are strongly ethical in how they conduct their part of the military operation. The United Kingdom has a wonderful history in that, as does Australia and many of the NATO countries. I have a view now that the more gender balance, and indeed racial balance, you have within the military forces of developed countries, the better they will perform as military forces, and that will also have the added advantage of being able, as I said earlier, to engage with 100% of the societies within which those military forces are working.

My own view, and I may have misunderstood your question, is that I think women have a role in all aspects of military endeavour. It is up to the societies from which military forces are drawn and their elected representatives to determine the parameters for that military service. However, in Australia's case we have opened up all areas of military service to women, which I think is a very good thing. We have women commanding engineer regiments, we have women commanding tank troops, and we have women flying helicopters. Indeed, my own experience is that there is no front line any more in the types of military operations that have largely been conducted by the British Army and the Australian Army since the secession of our involvement in the Korean peninsula in the 1950s. So there has to be a focus by people such as me who are charged by my Government with building the most capable military force and army possible to make the best use of all the talent that is on offer. My argument is a hardnosed one formed not out of altruism but with a focus on capability and that we need to be as creative as we can be in giving everybody, male or female and irrespective of their racial heritage or the god they believe in, the chance to reach their potential.

In answer to your first question, I would make no comment about the NATO forces. It is not my experience of working with them on operations, and I have certainly travelled through a number of the countries. I would make the point, though, that NATO has reached out to speak to me about some of the steps that the Australian Army has taken to better understand how it could make better use of the talent that is available within its populations.

Lord Sterling of Plaistow: General, I think there has been a slight misunderstanding. I was really talking about front-line troops, not vis-à-vis the gender factor. For argument's sake, a clerk sitting in Kandahar is not quite the same as a patrol going behind enemy lines in Erbil province. I was looking at it more through those eyes. But you are particularly experienced—

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: I am sorry, but if I could just correct you. The British Army has had women well out beyond the wire in harm's way for the entire period that you have been in Afghanistan, as has the Australian Army. I think we have to be careful about seeing contemporary operations for what they are.

Lord Sterling of Plaistow: I am sorry. Again, there might be a slight misunderstanding. I was not talking about whether women are involved or not. I was talking about the attitude of

troops actually going into formal action as against doing the other roles which are obviously the back-up of any major army.

I refer to your experience in East Timor, when you commented about the militia behaving the way they did. Did you come to any views when you were there as to what one does with people who act like that and how one could or could not bring the process of the law into action?

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: I do not speak with current knowledge, but I would think that the number of militia who were prosecuted for crimes of murder, rape and assault was depressingly small. There are many reasons for that. In part it was due to a decision made by the incoming President of Timor-Leste, Xanana Gusmão, to engage with both Indonesia and the East Timorese population that had fled west across the border into Indonesia from a basis of reconciliation. It was an extraordinary step to take but one that has had long-lasting beneficial consequences for contemporary Timor-Leste. More broadly, the way that the international community identifies and collects evidence, interviews witnesses, and draws people into a prosecutorial world to establish their guilt or innocence of alleged crimes against humanity, including of course rape and murder, is something that has been pretty ineffective, probably since time began. Even with all the powers that we have now, along with all the imagery and the means by which we can conduct surveillance of battle spaces, it still remains exceptionally problematic. Even if you can collect the evidence, you will still find it difficult to get national governments to release the individuals alleged to have committed these acts into the international communities to be dealt with.

Lord Sterling of Plaistow: Thank you, General. That is very interesting to hear.

Q25 Baroness Young of Hornsey: Good evening, General. I would like to ask you a few questions, some of which relate to a previous question from Lord Sterling. They connect with this project that you are on in a way, which is about gender equality. One could say somewhat provocatively that there is no country in the world where violence against women and girls happens without any sense of co-ordinated punishment or bringing people to account, whether it is rape, domestic abuse or whatever it might be. So one could argue that what happens in times of conflict is almost like a magnification of that situation. Given that, this is about who is to be held responsible for what happens. This culture of impunity that seems to have arisen has been drawn to our attention by a number of witnesses and in submissions. How can we ensure that even in armies that appear to be exempt from such activities that the kinds of attitudes and behaviours we would like to see do not replicate those that are in the broader society?

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: I think there is a fairly straightforward way that you can achieve that: you could change the rules that govern the commitment of forces under the United Nations. That could be done right now if it were possible to get agreement in that body. That would provide no immunity for individuals who are alleged to have committed these crimes, because of course it is only the first step. There has to be the proper gathering of evidence and then a holding to account. That is not the case under the United Nations now. In multinational forces that deploy under a NATO banner or a coalition of the willing as we saw in, for example, Iraq and certainly in East Timor, there could, under a status of force agreement or under the rules that bind an international agreement, be the removal of that immunity, but I see no instances of that at all. These are not, to be fair, matters for soldiers. These are matters for politicians and governments.

I will correct you on a small point, if I may. This is not a project that I am on. I understand more clearly now the issues around domestic violence and sexual violence against women in a way that I had not done before. I am deeply committed to whatever I can do to add a small voice to try to improve the lot of women and children around the world, and I think that many in my position have a responsibility to speak as forthrightly as they can about that.

Baroness Young of Hornsey: I am sorry, I did not intend to be insulting. On the contrary, as far as I am concerned—

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: I did not take it that way. I just wanted to correct you.

The Chairman: Colleagues, I think we have very warm thanks to give to General Morrison for his incredibly full answers, which have covered all the points that Members raised.

We thank you also, General, for your past service and for your current responsibilities because there is no doubt that you have been pushing for change in this particular field of work, which is our prime concern at this time. Thank you for what you have done and all you are doing at the moment. We hope to see you in one way or another. Perhaps you will drop in on us in the House of Lords and join us for coffee some time.

Lieutenant-General (ret.) David Morrison: Thank you very much. I wish you all the best in your endeavours.