

Parliamentary Activity - Gulf War Issues

6th February – 27th April 2009

Overview:

During this period two questions for oral answer and six questions for written answer were asked in the House of Lords. In addition to this, Kevan Jones also issued a Written Ministerial Statement on UK Veterans' Mortality Data.

House of Lords Questions for Written Answer:

Lord Morris of Manchester (Labour) (Two Questions)
Lord Bramall (Crossbench) (One Question)
Countess of Mar (Crossbench) (Two Questions)
Lord Tyler (Liberal Democrat) (One Question)

House of Lords Questions for Oral Answer:

Lord Lloyd of Berwick (Crossbench) (One Question)
Lord Craig of Radley (Crossbench) (One Question)

House of Commons Written Ministerial Statement

Kevan Jones (Labour, North Durham) (UK Veterans' Mortality Data)

February 2009

Monday 23rd February:

[House of Lords Written Answer: Gulf War Illnesses \(MRC Findings\)](#)

Lord Morris of Manchester asked Her Majesty's Government:

Further to the work and findings of the Medical Research Council (MRC) on Gulf War illnesses, published in 2003, whether they have asked the MRC for its comments on the report and findings of the Congressionally mandated United States Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War illnesses, published on 17 November 2008; and whether and by whom the MRC's work and findings have been peer-reviewed. [HL1381]

The Minister of State, Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills (Lord Drayson):

The Ministry of Defence have noted that the report published by the US Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses has been referred by the Department of Veterans Affairs to the Institute of Medicine for review. The Ministry of Defence is awaiting the outcome of this process before making any comments on the report (or inviting the MRC to make any comments) and deciding on any action it may wish to take relating to the report.

The 2003 MRC review of research into UK Gulf veterans' illnesses was carried out by the Military Health Research Advisory Group, an independent group of experts in the area. In carrying out its work, the MHRAG conducted a series of workshops to consult directly with the wider scientific community and parties interested in the field.

[House of Lords Written Answer: Gulf War \(NAPS Tablets\)](#)

Lord Morris of Manchester asked Her Majesty's Government:

Further to the Written Answer by Baroness Taylor of Bolton on 22 January (WA 221—22), whether they will ask the Commission on Human Medicine to review the decision not to include any restriction on co-administration in the instructions for the use of the nerve agent pre-treatment sets (NAPS) tablets, each containing pyridostigmine bromide, used for the troops deployed to the 1990—91 Gulf conflict in the light of the findings of the Congressionally-mandated United States Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses published on 17 November 2008; and whether they will arrange for a copy of the letter to be sent by Baroness Taylor of Bolton to be published in the Official Report. [HL995]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Taylor of Bolton): As set out in the Written Answer of 22 January 2009 (WA 221-222), it is necessary to research our records on the issue prior to providing my noble friend with a substantive reply. We will arrange for the letter to be published in the *Official Report*, or deposited in the Library of the House as appropriate.

[House of Lords Written Answer: Gulf War Illnesses \(Medical Research\)](#)

Lord Bramall asked Her Majesty's Government:

Whether they will ask the Congressionally-mandated United States Research Advisory Committee on Gulf War Veterans' Illnesses to peer review the work and findings of the Medical Research Council on Gulf War illnesses. [HL1499]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence (Baroness Taylor of Bolton): The 2003 Medical Research Council (MRC) review of research into UK Gulf veterans' illnesses was carried out by the Military Health Research Advisory Group (MHRAG), an independent group of experts in the area. Its aim was to review the published and emerging scientific findings and to advise on areas for future research. In carrying out its work, the MHRAG conducted a series of workshops to consult directly with the wider scientific community and parties interested in the field.

The primary research assessed by the MRC in its 2003 review of UK Gulf veterans' illnesses has already been peer reviewed. No further peer review of the MRC review itself is required.

March 2009

Tuesday 10th March:

[House of Lords Question for Oral Answer: Gulf War Illnesses](#)

Lord Lloyd of Berwick asked Her Majesty's Government:

Whether they will now accept the findings of the United States Research Advisory Committee, based on a review of all the evidence, that the two most likely causes of Gulf War illness are the issue of NAPS tablets by the Ministry of Defence and the use of organophosphate sprays.

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence): My Lords, first, I am sure that the whole House will wish to join me in offering sincere condolences to the family and friends of Marine Michael Laski, Corporal Tom Gaden, Lance Corporal Paul Upton and Rifleman Jamie Gunn, who died as a result of injuries sustained on operations in Afghanistan recently, and to the family and friends of Sapper Patrick Azimkar and Sapper Mark Quinsey, who were killed in Northern Ireland on Saturday.

Turning to the Question, the Government have examined the report following its publication on 17 November. Noble Lords will be aware that the United States Department of Veterans Affairs has sent the report to the highly respected Institute of Medicine for review, and we await the outcome of this process before making any conclusions on the report.

Lord Lloyd of Berwick (Crossbench): My Lords, I thank the noble Baroness for that Answer. Does she agree that the massive report which has been furnished by the committee is itself a review of more than 1,800 scientific papers published on both sides of the Atlantic? What need therefore is there for any further review? Does she further agree that the causes of Gulf War illness identified by the Research Advisory Committee are both causes for which the Ministry of Defence was directly responsible in 1991? If so, when will the Government acknowledge that simple fact and offer the victims some hope of compensation?

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence): My Lords, the United States report is an important review of all the literature that has been published on this issue, with some new comments. The fact that it has gone to the Institute of Medicine is also an important factor, and it would be wrong for us to pre-empt what the outcome of that review might be. It is also important to realise that it is not just this country and the United States, but also those in charge in Australia, New Zealand and Canada who will be waiting for that particular review. In terms of the treatment of and compensation for the victims of Gulf War syndrome, as it is called, the principle should be that payment is made on the basis of need and the level of disability, and this is what happens with the war pensions scheme.

Lord Astor of Hever (Shadow Minister for Defence): My Lords, we on these Benches also send our condolences to the families and friends of the marines and soldiers killed in Afghanistan, and the two soldiers from the Royal Engineers tragically killed in Northern Ireland. The Minister will be aware that I have raised Questions in the past about the health of veterans' children. Do the Government have any plans to conduct research into this issue?

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence): My Lords, the Government have spent some money researching the health of victims' children, but so far we have not found causal relationships. Obviously, if there were to be new evidence, we would be more than willing to look at it. We accept that there are still many puzzling features and indeed much contradictory evidence about many of the inquiries that have taken place.

Lord Morris of Manchester (Labour): My Lords, I share the gratitude of the noble and learned Lord, Lord Lloyd of Berwick, to my noble friend, but whatever happened to the peer reviewing of the research-based decision taken by the United States Government several years ago to accept motor neurone disease as a Gulf War-related illness, while the widows of British veterans of the conflict who have died of the condition still await parity?

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence): My Lords, the House will be aware that the system for claiming support and medical help in the United States is very different from that which appertains in this country, and, indeed, veterans cannot get help with support or indeed with medical care unless they are able to give a name to an illness. The evidence that we have shows that of the age group that we are talking about, five people who have had Gulf War syndrome have died of motor neurone disease. In a similar norm in the whole community, the figure would be slightly higher. So I do not think that as yet we have any evidence to suggest that it is a causal link.

Lord Tyler (Liberal Democrat): My Lords, has the interdepartmental group on organophosphates, which I think is called the Carden committee, considered the implications of this report for other victims of OP poisoning?

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence): My Lords, the committee to which I think the noble Lord refers was established by Defra and is called the Committee on the Toxicity of Chemicals in Food, Consumer Products and the Environment. It is undertaking a study to look at all the published literature, which is indeed vast, and we do not expect it to report until next year. Obviously it will look at any new evidence, but we still believe that the problems arise with acute exposure to organophosphates rather than the very low levels that could have been experienced during the Gulf War.

The Countess of Mar (Crossbench): My Lords, I declare an interest, as I know only too well from a personal point of view the effects of chronic exposure to organophosphates. Can the Minister explain why the Ministry of Defence and Defra have so much difficulty in accepting causation when a huge amount of literature indicates exactly what enzymes and cells are destroyed, permanently in many cases, by organophosphates? Why will they not look at treating patients with organophosphate poisoning? This is one of the worst problems that the Gulf War veterans have but they are not listened to by their GPs or by their consultants. Gulf veterans could give an awful lot of helpful information to consultants and doctors.

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence): My Lords, my honourable friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in another place recently met the Gulf Veterans Association and the British Legion. It took some time for that meeting to be arranged, but my honourable friend offered to meet, discuss and follow up all these problems. As for organophosphates, it is a question of the level of exposure. There is no doubt at all that the effects of acute exposure are very serious. What are not so clear are the possible effects of low-level exposure, and work is still going on to try to clarify that.

Lord Walton of Detchant (Crossbench): My Lords, the report to which my noble and learned friend Lord Lloyd referred is an extremely comprehensive and authoritative document which well deserves further detailed study. However, I hope the noble Baroness will agree that there is a difference of opinion about the cases of motor neurone disease as between those involved in motor neurone disease research in the UK and those in the United States. In this country, research workers prominent in this field do not find convincing the case for relating motor neurone disease to Gulf War syndrome.

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence): My Lords, I can confirm what the noble Lord has said. As I mentioned earlier, there are many contradictory findings in many of the inquiries that have taken place. The US Research Advisory Committee says that it is difficult to make simple conclusions about cause and result. We want to give priority to improving the health of Gulf War victims and to put our research effort into identifying beneficial treatments for the future. That has to be one of the things that we emphasise from now on.

April 2009

Wednesday 1st April 2009:

[House of Commons Written Ministerial Statement: Gulf War Veterans \(UK Morality\)](#)

Kevan Jones (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence):

As part of the Government's continuing commitment to investigate Gulf veterans' illnesses openly and honestly, data on the mortality of veterans of the 1990-91 Gulf conflict are published regularly. The most recent figures for the period 1 April 1991 to 31 December 2008 are published today as a National Statistic Notice on the Defence Analytical Services and Advice website.

The data for Gulf veterans are compared to that of a control group known as the "Era cohort" consisting of armed forces personnel of a similar profile in terms of age, gender, service, regular/reservists status and rank, who were in service on 1 January 1991 but were not deployed to the Gulf. As in the previous release, the "Era" group has been adjusted for a small difference in the age-profile of those aged 40 years and over, to ensure appropriate comparisons.

Key points to note in the data are:

There have been 997 deaths among the Gulf veterans and 1,008 in the age-adjusted Era comparison group.

The 997 deaths among Gulf veterans compare with approximately 1,609 deaths which would have been expected in a similar sized cohort taken from the general population of the UK with the same age and gender profile. This reflects the strong emphasis on fitness when recruiting and retaining service personnel.

These statistics continue to confirm that UK veterans of the 1990-91 Gulf conflict do not suffer an excess of overall mortality compared with service personnel that did not deploy.

The full notice can be viewed at: <http://www.dasa.mod.uk>

Thursday 2nd April 2009:

[House of Lords Written Answer: Gulf War Illnesses \(Organophosphates\)](#)

The Countess of Mar asked Her Majesty's Government:

Which organophosphate chemicals and other anticholinesterase chemical and medicinal products are licensed for use in the United Kingdom; and what is the purpose for which they are licensed. [HL2559]

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change & Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs): The details of those medicines, pesticides and veterinary medicines licensed for use in the UK containing organophosphate chemicals or other anticholinesterase active substances have been placed in the House Library.

[House of Lords Written Answer: Gulf War Illnesses \(Research Projects\)](#)

The Countess of Mar asked Her Majesty's Government:

How many research projects commissioned by the Ministry of Defence into Gulf War Illnesses have been placed with researchers at King's College, London, and how many have been placed with other institutions, since 1997. [HL2560]

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence):

The Ministry of Defence funded a research project investigating neuromuscular symptoms in Gulf veterans conducted by the Department of Psychological Medicine at Guy's, King's & St Thomas' School of Medicine. The MOD also funded the third phase of research undertaken by King's College consisting of a longitudinal study of the changing health of Gulf veterans over time and a further analysis of the health of a Bosnia cohort examined in earlier studies, which was funded by the US Department of Defence. The MoD has been guided on the research to be undertaken into Gulf veterans' illnesses by the Medical Research Council. The cost of the research to date is some £9 million. Information about the individual projects, researchers and organisations engaged to conduct the work is provided below. Note: All work except the rehabilitation has been completed.

Anthropological study into Gulf War syndrome— Ms S Kilshaw (University College London).

Cancer study—Professor G Macfarlane (University of Manchester).

Longitudinal study of changing health in Gulf veterans—M Hotopf/Professor A David/Professor S Wessely (Department of Psychological Medicine, Guy's, King's & St Thomas' School Of Medicine) (Third Phase).

Mortality/Morbidity—Professor G Macfarlane/ Dr N Cherry (University of Manchester).

Mortality/morbidity linkages study—Dr N Cherry (University of Manchester).

Neuromuscular symptoms in Gulf veterans— Dr M K Sharief/Dr M Rose/Professor S Wessely (Guy's, King's & St Thomas' School of Medicine).

Paraoxonase work—B Mackness (Manchester Royal Infirmary).

Reproductive Health study—Dr Pat Doyle (London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine).

Systematic literature review of published research—Professor Glyn Lewis (Cardiff University).

Testing for squalene in vaccines—Independent UK Laboratory.

Vaccines Interactions Research Programme—Dstl Porton Down.

Tuesday 21st April 2009:

[House of Lords Written Answer: Gulf War Illnesses](#)

Lord Tyler asked Her Majesty's Government:

Whether the Ministry of Defence was represented at the symposium on research into Gulf War illnesses held in the House of Lords on Tuesday 24 March. [HL2631]

Baroness Taylor of Bolton (The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Ministry of Defence): The Ministry of Defence was not represented at the symposium held in the House of Lords on 24 March. My honourable friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State and Minister for Veterans, Kevan Jones MP, received an invitation three days before the event took place but was already committed to another longstanding engagement overseas. My own Private Office did not receive an invitation.

Monday 27th April 2009:

[House of Lords Question for Oral Answer: Gulf War Illness](#)

Lord Craig of Radley asked Her Majesty's Government:

When they will announce their reaction to the Congressionally-mandated Research Advisory Committee's inquiry into Gulf War Illness, published in November 2008.

Lord Tunncliffe: My Lords, the Government made it clear on 10 March (*Official Report*, cols. 1055-57) that they would await the findings of the United States Institute of Medicine review of the Research Advisory Committee report. The Institute of Medicine plans to produce its report in February 2010.

Lord Craig of Radley: My Lords, I thank the Minister for that Answer, but my understanding from the chairman of the Research Advisory Committee was that the Institute of Medicine was not going to call for the report to be reviewed by it. In view of what the Minister has said, will he give the House an assurance that, once that reference has taken place, they will speedily find a conclusion to this dreadful problem that has run on for so long?

Lord Tunncliffe: My Lords, the whole House knows of the important work that the noble and gallant Lord, Lord Craig, has done for Gulf War veterans, but I find it difficult to give an assurance that I can secure closure, given the efforts that the Government have made so far. I have said that we expect a report from the Institute of Medicine in February 2010, but it is difficult to see in what way that will change what we are doing for these veterans. They are

being treated under what we believe to be fair procedures for addressing the disablement they are suffering.

Lord Tyler: My Lords, I have a non-pecuniary interest as a member of the Royal British Legion Gulf War Group. Will the Minister give a fuller explanation for why no one from his department attended the symposium in the House on 24 March on this important research work? He will be aware that first of all it was said that no invitations were received and then, in a Written Answer to me on 20 April, it was said that there was too short notice. However, I have in my hand two letters sent to the noble Baroness, Lady Taylor of Bolton, and to the Veterans Minister, dated 20 and 27 February, long before the symposium took place. Is it any wonder that veterans in the British Army feel that their service for this country is undervalued and their illnesses are not fully understood, because of the way that the ministry seems to treat all these issues?

Lord Tunncliffe: My Lords, I refute the suggestion that we do not look after our veterans or take a serious interest in this issue. The Ministry of Defence's policy is to attend symposiums like this one, and we would have been delighted to attend. The noble Lord may have in his hand letters of a particular date, but the Under-Secretary of State for Veterans, Kevan Jones, received an invitation in his office three days before the event took place and was already committed to another long-standing engagement overseas, while the private office of my noble friend Lady Taylor did not receive an invitation.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: My Lords, will my noble friend tell the House what the Government are doing to help the veterans of the 1990-91 Gulf War? Would it not be possible to consider giving some form of ex gratia payment to these brave ex-service men and women?

Lord Tunncliffe: My Lords, we have provided help for these individuals under the appropriate policies. They receive pensions for the level of disablement, and those pensions can be reviewed if the disablement increases. We have introduced policies in Command Paper 7424, *The Nation's Commitment: Cross-Government Support to our Armed Forces, their Families and Veterans*. It would be fundamentally wrong to treat veterans from the Gulf War with these conditions and these levels of disablement differently from veterans of any other operation who had a similar level of disablement.

Lord Morris of Manchester: My Lords, my noble friend knows of my high regard and respect for him and will recall this House having been told that, before addressing the implications of the inquiry's findings for afflicted British veterans of the conflict, the MoD must await the outcome of the US Institute of Medicine's review of its report. Can I now confirm that MPs and Peers have since been informed by the RAC, at the symposium held here in the Queen's Robing Room on 24 March, that its findings are not being reviewed by the Institute of Medicine, and that this was made clear by the institute itself in a letter from its senior programme officer on 24 April?

Lord Tunncliffe: My Lords, we understand that, in its press release on 1 December last year, the IOM committed to considering this report. We have spoken with the Department of Veterans Affairs, which says that it has no plans to reissue or update its statement. My understanding is that the study will take place and will report in February next year, as I said.

Lord Lloyd of Berwick: My Lords, will the noble Lord at least agree that the MoD was directly responsible for both causes of Gulf War illness identified in the report? Should not that factor be borne in mind in seeking to reach agreement with the veterans now?

Lord Tunncliffe: My Lords, I shall certainly not agree any such blanket statement with a lawyer, as I should not survive long if I did. I repeat that the pensions that the individuals have are about levels of disability and are uniform for the same levels of disability. In 1997, this Government had a new start for these groups. They agreed to study the groups and to commit to research. All this has been done. Lots of money has been spent on the research and we are now concentrating on the rehabilitation of these veterans. We see no value in committing our own resources to further study of causation. Of course, if our friends in the US have new information, we shall consider it.