

Leaked government memo reveals US-British tensions over Iraq

Richard Tyler**2 June 2004**

A Foreign Office memo leaked recently to the *Sunday Times* reveals growing disquiet with US policy in Iraq. The newspaper talks of “private reservations” inside the Labour government of Prime Minister Tony Blair over Washington’s approach.

The memo accuses US troops of employing heavy-handed military tactics in Fallujah and Najaf, which have “fuelled both Sunni and Shi’ite opposition to the coalition, and lost us much public support inside Iraq”.

“We need to double our efforts to ensure a sensible and sensitive US approach to military operations. The message seems to be accepted at the highest levels, but not always implemented lower down the command chain,” the memo notes.

Over one year since the supposed ending of the war, it paints a picture that is at odds with the usual line pushed by Washington and London. In contrast to the habitual depiction of the opposition faced by coalition troops as a disruptive minority, ascribed variously to “Saddam loyalists”, “former Baathist elements”, “foreign terrorists”, etc., who are shunned by ordinary Iraqis, the memo notes that the insurgents enjoy a “reservoir of popular support”.

The position of coalition forces in several places is described as “precarious”, with Italian troops said to have “lost control” of Nassiriya earlier this month. The memo baldly declares, “We should not underestimate the present difficulties”.

“Security difficulties are slowing reconstruction and affecting Iraqi confidence in the coalition. While power supplies this summer will be much better than last year, [CPA] targets for summer electricity production are unlikely to be met,” the memo states.

In its May 23 editorial, the pro-war *Sunday Times* describes the memo as “strong stuff”, writing that “The scandal of the treatment of detainees at Abu Graib has

sapped the moral authority of the coalition, inside Iraq and internationally.”

The deployment of further British troops is being delayed until after the June European and UK local elections, which many political commentators think voters may use to express their disapproval of the war. The Allied Rapid Reaction Corps, presently based in Germany, could then be dispatched to cover areas presently being patrolled by other European forces, or to take over US-held trouble spots such as Najaf and Quadisiyah, previously under Spanish command.

The memo, dated May 19, is entitled, “Iraq: The medium term”. In truth, Washington and London had neither a coherent medium nor long-term strategy when they launched the war. The invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq is an imperialist adventure, motivated by the desire to secure control of the region’s vast oil reserves, and to establish an outpost from which to project the might of US military power.

The fact that this was a war for oil and global hegemony is underscored by the terms of the draft resolution that Bush and Blair are presently attempting to push through the United Nations to regulate the June 30 handover. The powers of the US-led Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) are to be entrenched for years to come, revealing the word “provisional” as pure window dressing. US-appointed bodies will continue to exercise power over wide areas of Iraqi society, including the media and, significantly, the oil industry.

The *Sunday Times* bemoans that Washington and London are now paying the price of their own propaganda, which forecast coalition troops being “garlanded by grateful Iraqis” and the “swift and painless” transition to democracy. Instead, the war launched on Iraq by the world’s greatest military power has been followed by months of bitter fighting, costing

tens of thousands of Iraqi lives and hundreds of deaths of US and British soldiers.

The differences and disquiet revealed in the leaked memo are those of the junior partner in this criminal enterprise. However, the British ruling class can look back at its own long and bloody history of imperialist ventures and respectfully seeks to pass on the lessons it has learned in previous invasions, wars and occupations to its younger, but immensely more powerful trans-Atlantic successor.

Foremost among these is the need to cultivate a subservient local elite through which to exercise power.

Cynically, the memo comments, “More generally, we shall want to minimise the profile of coalition forces after July 1, and get the Iraqis out in front ... particularly in patrolling and policing.” But there can be no doubt that following the handover to a “sovereign” Iraqi regime on June 30, Washington will still call the tune in Baghdad.



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