

Iraq occupation beset by constant tensions between US and UK

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Documents leaked to the *Telegraph* newspaper indicate how severe tensions developed between the British and United States armed forces in Iraq, to the extent that a former British Chief of Staff described relations with his American counterparts as “akin to dealing with a group of Martians”.

The documents consist of dozens of “post-operational reports” from commanders at all levels, described by the *Telegraph* as being “extraordinarily frank”, as well as two “overall lessons learnt” papers compiled by the Army dealing with the war and the subsequent occupation of Iraq.

The documents, published just prior to the official Iraq Inquiry headed by Sir John Chilcot, are part of disputes within the British establishment and military over the handling of the invasion and occupation of Iraq. (See: “British documents detail US and UK plans for Iraq war”)

They describe the war phase as a “significant military success” but one achieved against a “third-rate army”. Its “significant” weaknesses would have been “punished” by a “more capable enemy” “severely.” “At least four commanders use the same word—‘appalling’—to describe the performance of the Foreign Office and Ministry of Defence,” the *Telegraph* notes.

The *Sunday Telegraph* stated that its leaked documents pose “key questions for Sir John Chilcot and his committee, such as whether planning was adequate, troops properly equipped and the occupation mishandled, and will almost certainly be seen by the inquiry.”

The most revealing document is the internal analysis of “the period following major combat operations” between May 2003 and January 31, 2005, entitled “Stability operations in Iraq”.

Using the documents, Andrew Gilligan writes that high-level attempts to conceal the advanced plans for war from all but “very small numbers” of officials “constrained” the planning process. This led to a “rushed” operation

“lacking in coherence and resources” that caused “significant risk” to troops and “critical failure” in the post-war period. Operations were so under-resourced “that some troops went into action with only five bullets each”. Troops even “had to deploy to war on civilian airlines, taking their equipment as hand luggage. Some troops had weapons confiscated by airport security.” The supply chain was described by one commander as “absolutely appalling”.

The Foreign Office unit to plan for post-war Iraq was only established in late February, 2003, three weeks before the war started and the war plans “contained no detail once Baghdad had fallen”. This produced a “notable loss of momentum” that was exploited by insurgents. One commander is quoted as stating, “It was not unlike 1750s colonialism where the military had to do everything ourselves.”

The “inability to restore security early during the occupation” was the “critical failure” of the campaign, the documents state. A senior British officer states, “The UK Government, which spent millions of pounds on resourcing the security line of operations, spent virtually none on the economic one, on which security depended.”

Far from aiding the US-UK “special relationship”, Major General Andrew Stewart states that “our ability to influence US policy in Iraq seemed to be minimal” and disclosing how he spent “a significant amount of my time” “evading” and “refusing” orders from his US superiors.

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Citing one example of a lack of cooperation, the *Telegraph* reported, “When the Americans decided, in March 2004, to arrest a key lieutenant of the Shia leader Muqtada al-Sadr—an event that triggered an uprising throughout the British sector—it was not co-ordinated with us and no-one [was] told that it was going to

happen,' said the senior British field commander at the time, Brigadier Nick Carter. 'Had we known, we would at least have been able to prepare the ground.' Instead, 'the consequence [was] that my whole area of operations went up in smoke... as a result of coalition operations that were outwith my control or knowledge and proved to be the single most awkward event of my tour'."

One of the most frank interviews regarding UK-US tensions is given by Colonel J.K. Tanner OBE. Tanner was chief of staff, Multinational Division South East [the British-controlled division, commanded by Major-General Andrew Stewart] from November 2003 to May 2004.

He is quoted stating, "I now realise that I am a European, not an American. We managed to get on better... with our European partners and at times with the Arabs than with the Americans. Europeans chat to each other, whereas dialogue is alien to the US military... dealing with them corporately is akin to dealing with a group of Martians."

A major reason for the post-war tensions was the efforts of the rival imperialist powers to secure their share of the contracts to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure, in the face of US efforts to monopolise this lucrative enterprise. Asked about "nation-building", Tanner boasts that the British initially "got ahead of the Americans in the North". But subsequent failures due to under-funding were "compounded by US commercial practices as their system of contracts seemed designed to exclude all other but US business."

"The whole system was appalling," he continues "We experienced real difficulty in dealing with the American military and civilian organisations who, partly through arrogance and partly through bureaucracy, dictate that there is only one way: the American way... Despite our so-called 'special relationship' I reckon that we were treated no differently to the Portuguese."



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