A FRAMEWORK FOR FAILURE?
THE IMPACT OF SHORT TOUR LENGTHS AND SEPARATE NATIONAL COMMAND AND CONTROL ON BRITISH OPERATIONAL ART AND COALITION WARFARE IN IRAQ, 2003-2009

A Monograph

by

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14. ABSTRACT

The British Army that deployed to Iraq in 2003 had a reputation for experience and skill at war-fighting and counter-insurgency (COIN); it also had a doctrine and ethos derived from the philosophy of 'the manoeuvrist approach', mission command, and critical thinking. Yet the campaign that followed stretched the British Army well outside its intellectual comfort zone and resulted in a poor campaign in southern Iraq. The evidence provided by the United Kingdom's senior military leaders, diplomats and politicians to the Iraq Inquiry shows that many things went wrong: poor planning; scarce resources; a shift in strategy towards Afghanistan; and a campaign half-heartedly supported by the rest of the UK government and bureaucracy. However, before gazing out the window should we first look in the mirror? Are there insights for British forces, and our key partners, for coalition operations in the future?

This monograph addresses this difficult question by focusing on the impact of the command and control structure chosen by British forces in Iraq. What was the impact on British forces and the wider coalition of the UK's decision to use its own national operational echelon to command UK forces in southern Iraq? How did successive British Commanders of MND (SE) approach the competing pressures inherent within the chosen command and control structure of being a tactical commander subordinate to two operational headquarters: one in Baghdad, the other in London? Did this situation create unnecessary tension, and flaws, that frustrated efforts to better understand the environment and craft an effective, coherent coalition campaign?

Exploring these dynamics offers value for both the British and American militaries. From a UK perspective, it is a necessary step in analyzing the operational approach and identifying the lessons from the unexpectedly difficult experience in Iraq. For United States officers, it is worth examining as future US-led coalitions are expected to confront environments, and problems, no less challenging than those faced in Iraq from 2003-2010. For both, it concludes with recommendations for achieving better command and control structures and tour lengths for coalition warfare in the future.

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by Major Stephen A. Campbell, 71 pages.

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commander subordinate to two operational headquarters: one in Baghdad, the other in London?
Did this situation create unnecessary tension, and flaws, that frustrated efforts to better
understand the environment and craft an effective, coherent coalition campaign? Were the flaws
in this structure compounded by the very different tour lengths between US and UK forces?
Finally, how did this structure affect the ability of UK forces to understand the environment they
were in, assess the effectiveness of their operational approach and, if needed, change course?

Exploring these dynamics offers value for both the British and American militaries. From a UK
perspective, it is a necessary step in analyzing the operational approach and identifying the
lessons from the unexpectedly difficult experience in Iraq. For United States officers, it is worth
examining as future US-led coalitions are expected to confront environments, and problems, no
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coalition warfare in the future.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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GLOSSARY

BAR	*British Army Review*. The UK equivalent to the US Army's *Military Review*.
COTK	The Iraqi-led Operation 'Charge of the Knights' ('Saulat al-Fursan') that defeated the Shia militias in Basra and Maysan Provinces in 2008.
JAM	'Jaish Al Mahdi' also known as the 'Army of the Mahdi' or 'Mahdi Army'. A short hand term for the Shia militia ostensibly led by Shia cleric and leader of the Sadr Trend Muqtada Al Sadr.
MNC-I	Multinational Corps, Iraq.
MND (SE)	Multinational Division, South East.
MNF-I	Multinational Forces, Iraq.
MOD	Ministry of Defence. The UK's government department responsible for defence and the military (the counterpart to the United States Department of Defense).
OPCOM	'Operational Command': the authority granted to assign missions or tasks to subordinate commanders, to deploy units, to re-assign forces and to retain or delegate operational and/or tactical control as necessary. It excludes administration or logistics (UK definition, Joint Warfare Publication 0-10 United Kingdom Doctrine for Joint and Multinational Operations, Sept 1999).
OPCON	Authority to perform command over subordinates encompassing organizing and employing commands, assigning tasks, designating objectives and all direction needed to complete the mission. Includes authority to organize command and forces (US definition, JP 1-02 Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, 8 November 2010 as amended through 15 July 2012).
PIC	'Provincial Iraqi Control'; the desired goal of transitioning from Multinational Force responsibility for security in an area to Iraqi control. This process occurred at province by province across the MNC-I theatre of operations hence 'PIC'.
PJHQ	Permanent Joint Headquarters. The UK equivalent to all US Combatant Commands.
TACON	The authority delegated to a commander to assign tasks to forces under his command for the accomplishment of the mission assigned by higher authority. (UK definition, JWP 0-10, Sept 1999). This is equivalent to US TACON
TELIC	Operational name given for UK conventional forces deployed to MND (SE).
ZENITH	Operational name given by the British military for the withdrawal of UK forces from Basra City in conjunction with transition to Provincial Iraqi Control.

ILLUSTRATIONS

The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish by that test the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature.[1]

—Carl Von Clausewitz

INTRODUCTION: LESSONS FROM, AND FOR, A JUNIOR PARTNER?

In March 2003 the land forces of a United States-led coalition entered Iraq; it was the second time in 25 years that US forces, along with its long-standing ally the United Kingdom, fought Saddam Hussein's regime in a ground war. Unlike 1991, the outcome was regime change and a military occupation of Iraq but no legitimization of the coalition presence through an armistice agreement to end the war. The intervention inadvertently fathered conditions that degenerated into civil war and international jihadi, Iraqi Sunni, and Shia anti-occupation insurgencies sponsored by elements from across the entire Middle East. Few noticed it at the time, but, UK forces were set to be in the unprecedented position of being the junior partner in a counter-insurgency campaign.

Despite a strong historical track record in counter-insurgency, and recent experience operating in 'wars amongst the people', all did not go well and the Iraq conflict is still a painful, controversial issue in the UK.[2] However, even at this relatively early stage some sober reflection on the available evidence offers useful insights for our collective understanding of operational art and how it can be affected by relatively minor military decisions such as the type of command

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[1]Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, Edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 88.

[2]For example, the controversy in July 2013 over the UK Ministry of Defence's refusal to permit serving General Officers to contribute to a major work on the UK's recent wars compiled by the eminent historian Sir Hew Strachan. See: http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/jul/19/mod-risking-soldiers-iraq-afghanistan-generals (accessed 6 October 2013).

and control structure within the coalition and the ideal length of operational tours for those serving in the conflict. The former may seem like a dry, uninteresting matter compared to weapon systems, combat or intelligence. However, the chance of operational failure can be increased by not grasping the likely costs, benefits, and risks to unity of effort by underestimating the importance of choosing between integrated, parallel, and lead nation command structures in coalition warfare. The evidence available (thus far) from the British experience in Iraq suggests that once a structural flaw is in place at the outset of a campaign the unintended consequences can be substantial and long term. In the British case, by creating a command structure incapable of developing an understanding of the environment in southern Iraq deeper than its own six month tour thereby preventing the responsiveness and agility needed to assess and develop a sound operational approach.

Identifying valuable lessons for the future is an intimidating prospect in any circumstance; the difficulty increases when events are recent and narratives contested. It is beyond the scope of this monograph to conduct an in-depth analysis of the British campaign in southern Iraq. However, it is possible to make a start by analyzing the underlying architecture of the campaign by focusing on the military command and control structure. The command and control structure was the common denominator for the British campaign. Although nowhere near as prominent as notorious equipment issues, command and control shaped the operational approach, problem-framing, and, indirectly, contributed to the gradual divergence of operational approaches within the coalition by shaping the passage of information, situational understanding, and development of competing priorities. By starting with an examination of the effect of the command and control structure on operational art, and how British leaders in Basra grappled with an unfamiliar problem, the opportunity exists to identify wider lessons for future coalition warfare that can inform debate in the US and UK.

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This monograph analyses the role of the command and control structure for the British land forces in Multi-National Division, South East ('MND (SE)') and its impact over time on the operational approach taken by UK forces in Iraq. It asks if there was a structural command and control flaw that significantly contributed to British difficulties by creating a framework that discouraged adaptation. Did this structure help UK commanders' re-frame the problem and then change the UK's operational approach? The key issue is the ability of the parallel UK national operational echelon, Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ), to provide expertise, insight, leadership continuity, and maintain a coherent campaign with the coalition. In assessing PJHQ's success as an operational echelon, it essential to explore its ability to identify, and understand, the deteriorating conditions in southern Iraq and adjust the operational approach accordingly. In short, did the command and control structure enable it to frame and then re-frame the problem so UK forces could adapt and win?

There is relatively little secondary source analysis in the public domain on the British experience in Iraq with nothing on the specific issue of the command and control arrangements within the coalition and its impact on military performance. The secondary sources that do exist are limited: two recently published controversial histories and a sprinkling of academic articles from 2008 to the present date. Primary sources are considerably better than could be expected for so recent a conflict due to the declassification of official documents and public testimonies of many British politicians, civil servants, and military leaders to the UK's official Iraq Inquiry. The net output from all sources is a sense that the Iraq campaign did not go well for the British military but that a systematic examination of the causes and lessons has not begun let alone been completed. The following section provides a brief overview of the discourse from secondary sources, such as *British Army Review*, and the primary source material generated by the Iraq Inquiry. The former highlights the lack of consensus within the British military on the lessons

from Iraq; the latter provides a fascinating insight into the conflict – particularly the thought process and actions of British military leaders in Iraq and the UK.

The first sign of external critiques of the British-led campaign in southern Iraq emerged in 2008 when various American, British, and French academics noted the difficulties encountered by the British military and expressed surprise that the situation was so poor given the early expectation the British Army was highly skilled in counter insurgency.[3] Within the professional discourse in *British Army Review* there was almost no reflection on the British campaign in Iraq until the campaign was already five years old.

The weather broke in the 'Summer 2009' edition; intriguingly, the editor of *British Army Review* noted the absence of articles on Iraq was due to lack of submitted material and not to any official policy discouraging debate.[4] Following the high profile, Iraqi-led Operation 'Charge of the Knights' that reshaped the entire campaign in the south, *British Army Review* published back-to-back editions on the British performance, and experience, in southern Iraq. The first edition included an account by Brigadier-General Storrie, the then most recently returned UK Brigade Commander in Basra, and articles from two Americans critical of the British performance. Professor Marston, an expert on the British Army's experience learning and adapting in Burma during World War Two and in the Malayan conflict, appraised the British Army's failure to understand its own counter-insurgency doctrine and difficulties in learning; Colonel Mansoor, a close aide to General Petraeus in Iraq, noted the poor UK performance in contrast to the US

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[3]Warren Chin, "Where did it all go wrong? Reassessing British COIN in Iraq" *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, (Winter 2008), 119, 133.

[4]"This was not editorial policy - we simply did not have the material" BAR editor's response to Brigadier Sandy Storrie, "First Do No Harm – 7 Armoured Brigade in Southern Iraq" *British Army Review* 147, (Summer 2009), 29.

ability to recognize failure, adapt and learn. Mansoor also recognized the contribution of the

UK's national command and control framework preventing British forces in Basra from fully

integrating with the coalition campaign run in Baghdad:

> British forces were hampered by political constraints thrust upon them by an
> unsympathetic government, which insisted on running operations from Whitehall rather
> than nesting them into the Multi-National Force-Iraq campaign.[5]

The following edition of *British Army Review* reined back on self-criticism of the British

performance with two articles defending the British performance and casting doubt on the long

term value of aspects of the US approach. This included a spirited defense of the operational

approach that produced the highly contentious 'Accommodation' with the Jaish Al Mahdi in

Basra prior to 'Charge of the Knights' and the assertion that it could prove a better framework for

stability than the US-brokered, and much praised, Al Anbar Awakening.[6] At that point, debate

and discourse ceased.

Following the above smattering of articles in *British Army Review*, the first

comprehensive account of the conflict was published in December 2012. Fairweather's *A War of

Choice: Honour, Hubris and Sacrifice: The British in Iraq* is a well-researched account with

excellent access to the UK Ministry of Defence (MoD), US, and Iraqi sources. Fairweather's

thesis is that due to a combination of many factors, some, but not all beyond their control, the

British military was overwhelmed in southern Iraq. From Fairweather's account there are two

important conditions that must shape analysis of the British operational approach in Iraq. First,

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[5]Peter Mansoor, "The British Army and the Lessons from the Iraq War" *British Army Review* 147, (Summer 2009), 4.

[6]Brigadier Sandy Storrie, "Talking to the Enemy: Informal Conflict Termination in Iraq" and Colonel Ian Thomas, "Pointing the Way Out: the Utility of Force and the Basra Narrative, Jan to Aug 2007" *British Army Review* 148, (Winter 2009-2010).

the disproportionate influence of perceptions and priorities in London compared to the actual conditions in Iraq; second, the long term impact on the operational flexibility of the forces in Iraq after the decision made in 2004 to increases UK force levels, and role, in Afghanistan in 2006.

It is too early to tell if Fairweather's blunt account will prompt greater internal reflection within the British military. It would be inaccurate to state that since that flurry of interest and debate in *British Army Review* in 2009 nothing further has been written about Iraq; however, if the hope was to provoke a crescendo of constructive self-reflection then the silence has been deafening. This is odd as there has been no shortage of articles on the British experience in Helmand Province, Afghanistan. It also misses the opportunity for forthright, honest, but constructive debate that develops new concepts and innovation within the profession. New doctrine and public debate can be tremendous engines for change of where there are two examples within living memory in the US Army: the debate articulated within the pages of *Military Review* following General William DePuy's new FM 100-5 Operations doctrine in 1976 and the role of FM 3-24 in encouraging change, new ideas and approaches in Iraq from 2006 onwards. Is there enough material in the public domain to merit meaningful debate? Although much material remains classified, extensive primary sources are available from the official public inquiries–most recently the Iraq Inquiry.

The UK's Iraq Inquiry, colloquially known as 'the Chilcot Inquiry' after its Chairman Sir John Chilcot, is not expected to publish its report until the end of 2013.[7] However, as a public inquiry the vast bulk of the testimony is already available online. All thirteen of the British General Officers who commanded Multinational Division, South East in Southern Iraq testified;

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[7]Prior to the Iraq Inquiry, there were three other inquiries into aspects of the Iraq war: a Foreign Office internal inquiry, the Butler Report and the Hutton Report.

the General Officers who served in the UK's Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ), the MOD

and as Deputy Commanders in Multi-National Forces Iraq also contributed testimonies. The Iraq

Inquiry material provides a valuable insight into the thinking behind decisions in the campaign as

the various commanders struggled to achieve the desired political end-state in increasingly

adverse conditions within Iraq while reconciling competing perspectives and priorities in

Baghdad, Basra, Washington D.C., and London.[8]

In summary, the existing secondary and primary source material indicate that while there

is not yet an agreed historical narrative for the UK experience in Iraq, there are solid grounds for

constructive criticism and a detailed examination of the performance of the British military.

Though incomplete, and even contradictory, the primary source material provides the best

framework to begin analysis of the operational approach and identification of valid lessons. The

analysis within this document is informed by the discourse of existing secondary sources but

driven by evaluation of the testimony provided to the Iraq Inquiry by senior British military

officers. The latter provide a fascinating insight into command, problem-framing and the inherent

difficulties in trying to grasp how to deal with an unfamiliar, ill-structured problem.

The methodology for this monograph is a historical analysis of the role of the command

and control structure in shaping problem-framing and operational art in the British campaign. It

examines the role the parallel national chain of command played in diverging the British and US

operational approaches–particularly in the UK's failure to re-frame the problem and conscious

decision not to match the change in US approach as the situation deteriorated in 2004-2007. The

historical background is covered in the next section where a basic narrative of the British and US

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[8]For a full explanation of the purpose and terms of reference of the Iraq Inquiry, see the official website: http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/ (accessed 30 July 2013).

experience in Iraq is provided to identify any evidence of the command and control structure

adversely affecting problem framing and the operational approach. Detailed analysis of those

points of friction then follows to answer the central question: the extent to which the existence of

a separate UK operational echelon headquarters made it more difficult for the coalition to achieve

a coherent operational approach. Finally, the wider implications and potential lessons for

coalition warfare in the future are explored in the conclusion.

CAMPAIGN HISTORY: 'SIX YEARS OF SIX MONTH TOURS'

Any narrative of the UK's experience as a counter-insurgent in the Iraq war must begin

with the political and military context of the size of the British military commitment in 2003.

Although the junior partner to the United States, the UK deployed as substantial expeditionary

force as it could for the invasion of Iraq. Similar to the 1991 Gulf War, the 'Land Component'

comprised a full Armored Division with additional supporting elements–one of only two

Divisions in full time active service in the British Army at that time. When the coalition crossed

the line of departure into Iraq the UK was the second largest troop contributor with 46,000 troops.

However, once the occupation began the British military commitment reduced substantially to try

to balance the Iraq conflict with all other UK global operations and the (funded) capabilities of

the British military.[9] This downward trend was never reversed despite the deteriorating conditions

within Iraq and the decision by US forces to 'surge' in 2007 (see figure 1.1).

Figure showing UK Force levels Iraq (Source: MOD Official Figures). War-fighting peak: 46,000 Apr 2003. Occupation peak: 18,000 May 2003. Rapid Decline: 8,600 May 2004. Marginal Decline: 8,500 May 2005. Decline resumes: 7,200 May 2006. Decline continues: 5,500 May 2007. Final period as lead nation: 4,100 May 2008-09. Last Post: 150 Jan 2010.

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[9]General Sir Mike Jackson, Iraq Inquiry, 23.

Figure 1.1 Declining UK Force levels in Iraq, 2003 – 2010.

Source: Author's own graph based on Ministry of Defence official figures.[10]

A key issue for the MOD was sustainability of the force for a long term campaign in Iraq due to other global military commitments. Aside from the on-going conflict in Afghanistan, UK forces were deployed in Northern Ireland in brigade strength; there were also commitments to the Balkans, the Falkland Islands plus other NATO, EU and UN responsibilities. These forces were commanded from the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ) by Commander Joint Operations (CJO). PJHQ was a relatively new structure in the UK–only set up in 1996-but had proven adequate to the demands of the various short-term expeditionary operations conducted in the Balkans and West Africa prior to 2003. In US terms it fulfilled the equivalent role of all US combatant commands combined in one headquarters.[11]

There was also a basic structural and resource limitation. The UK 'defence planning assumptions' stated the British Army was funded and resourced to maintain one long-term medium-scale deployment (a brigade) and one short-term small scale deployment (a battalion). Sustaining a force larger than a brigade on an enduring basis risked putting the army beyond the limits for which it was designed and funded–a factor informing thinking in the UK about the feasibility of any ambitious operational approach, or even a change of course, in Iraq. The

[10]Official figures from the UK Ministry of Defence (MOD). Available online: http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121212174735/http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/ FactSheets/OperationsFactsheets/OperationsInIraqFactsandFigures.htm (accessed: 9 July 2013).

[11]"I was very much seen by the Americans as the UK's global combatant commander." General Sir John Reith on the period of planning prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Telic: Gen Sir John Reith, Iraq Inquiry, 3. The date for the founding of PJHQ: https://www.gov.uk/the-permanent-joint-headquarters (accessed 30 Jul 2013).

negative effect of this context was noted by a senior British General Officer who experienced the

conflict from Baghdad and London:

> LTG FRY: I think that at one level we almost thought we could whip in and whip out. That was never explicitly stated. It was almost a natural consequence of the Strategic Defence Review, which said that we would be involved in expeditionary operations of limited duration, but we wouldn't accept enduring commitments. So to some extent all of the intellectual framework that we were basing our policies upon led us to assume that we would be able to get in and get out. That very quickly became -- it very quickly became apparent that that would not be the case.[12]

General Sir Mike Jackson, Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) for the entire British military from

January 2003 to August 2006, corroborated this view:

> GEN. SIR MIKE JACKSON: There was a very strong sense in Whitehall to bring down the force level as quickly as possible. I think at its height it was about 40,000, all services, mainly army obviously on the ground. That reduced very quickly to something around I think over a matter of almost weeks, if not just a few months. At the time there was a philosophy that -- it stems from the Strategic Defence Review, that what the United Kingdom is good at and should maintain that ability is rapid deployment -- rapid effects, and basically then hand over to somebody else.[13]

If the institutional context from the outset was an expectation that the operation was limited and

expeditionary, with one eye always on departure, there was a strong disincentive for British

military leaders in Basra to go against the grain by reporting a deteriorating situation, re-framing

the problem, and advocating a fundamental change in the operational approach.

By the end of 2003, UK forces provided the framework headquarters, staff, and

Commanding General for HQ MND (SE) and a combat brigade for Basra and Maysan Provinces.

This meant a subordinate role within the US-led Corps but also a leading role within the

(genuinely) multi-national forces of MND (SE). An Italian brigade assumed responsibility for

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[12]LTG Fry, Iraq Inquiry, 78.

[13]General Sir Mike Jackson, Iraq Inquiry, 23. Jack Fairweather, *War of Choice: Honour, Hubris, and Sacrifice – the British in Iraq, 2003-2009* (London, UK: Vintage, 2012), 29-30.

Dhi Qar Province while a Dutch, and later an Australian, battle group held the sparsely populated Al Muthanna Province. By mid-2003, British troops had reduced from 46,000 to 18,000 across the south (see figure 1.1.). They settled in for the long haul of an operational commitment requiring a rotation of brigades every six months and responsibility for the Division Headquarters in Basra (either formed HQs or composite staffs under a specially appointed commander). In practice, this meant troop rotation every 6-9 months on Operation 'Telic'–the UK name for its forces in MND (SE).[14]

When constructing a narrative of events in southern Iraq it is difficult to avoid a UK-centric bias based on six month tours. British military experiences of the conflict tended to be viewed in six month 'chunks' based on the particular 'Telic'. Even through the bias generated by six month tours, a pattern of deteriorating political and security conditions emerges: the initially peaceful occupation transitioned into lost British credibility and initiative through the riots of summer 2003; loss of consent for the occupation through unmatched local expectations of economic development; increasingly anti-MNF politics from the Iraqis developed under the period of Coalition Provisional Authority rule in 2004 and solidified with the Shia Islamist parties extensive success in provincial elections in 2005; the unintended alienation of the Sadrist Shia Islamists in Spring 2004; Shia Islamist subversion of the new Iraqi institutions such as the Iraqi police and Provincial Councils; and, by the end of 2004, an anti-occupation Shia Islamist insurgency linked to Baghdad and Iran; finally, an intra-Shia civil war for control of the south and anti-Sunni civil war to settle scores and ensure political power for the Shia.

This was a very challenging period that belies the perception that the Shia south was in some way more stable or a much better prospect for achieving the coalition's desired political

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[14]Fairweather, *War of Choice*, 44.

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goals than the Sunni-dominated areas of Iraq. The absence of AQI conducting multiple vehicle-borne improvised explosive device (VBIED) attacks, or Sunni insurgents targeting the ISF, was certainly no curse. However, only those who assess the seriousness of an insurgency by counting attacks could conclude that the south was politically promising, secure, low-threat, or close to meeting the coalition's desired political end-state. The presence of Shia Islamists determined to subvert the institutions of Iraq, expel MNF, and form strong ties with Iran, was as much a threat to the policy being pursued by the coalition as AQI–even if the consequent body count was fewer and had a lower profile in the global media. Ironically, southern Iraq's lower levels of violence, and apparent 'ownership' by the British, were probably a problem for increasing its profile and raising awareness of its political, economic, and social problems. It insulated US military leaders from the true significance of Shia Islamist subversion and frustrated the economic and political rehabilitation of Iraq by keeping Basra as an operational backwater.

From 2003 to 2006, it is a broad but fair generalization that all national events in Iraq exacerbated the situation in the south while doing little to raise MND (SE) as a higher priority for MNF-I. The CPA decision in April 2004 to close down Muqtada Al Sadr's newspaper, and even to directly target the young (would-be) cleric, sparked an anti-MNF uprising in Maysan and Basra Provinces that changed the dynamic of the occupation in south Iraq.[15] Although tactically defeated by August 2004 by means of a robust British Army response, the Sadr uprising catalysed the nascent anti-MNF Shia insurgency in the south and the surviving leaders of the Mahdi Army turned to elements in Iran for support. When they returned in the Spring of 2005 they did so with advanced technology–passive infra-red initiated explosively formed projectile IEDs (PIR EFP IEDs)–that fundamentally altered the security dynamics in southern Iraq. The possession and

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[15]MG Stewart, Iraq Inquiry, 68-69. Fairweather, *War of Choice,*100-102.

skilled use of PIR EFP IEDs by Shia insurgents significantly increased the threat to coalition

mobility and pushed UK troops towards new force protection measures. With the prospect of

losing soldiers to attacks by difficult to detect, but highly lethal, IEDs, commanders chose

defensive measures and tactics that reduced risk to personnel but indirectly began a process of

separating British forces from the populace.[16]

During 2004-2005 the UK and US approaches were coherent and consistent: prioritize

training of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) to set the conditions for transition and exit. The

operational approach by MNF-I Commander General Casey to prioritize training the ISF, rather

than focusing on the political conditions in the country generating the violence, chimed with the

UK campaign plan of transition and exit. However, it did little to raise MND (SE) in the list of

MNF-I priorities nor did it automatically draw the UK into any new ideas or approaches within

US circles. British forces could get on with it in 'their' piece of Iraq–ideally keeping the south as

quiet as possible (the latter was an explicit instruction to Commanding General MND (SE) from

coalition commander Lieutenant-General Sanchez).[17]

An external factor on the British strategy in Iraq was the decision made in 2004 to

increase its military role in Afghanistan in 2006. From 2004 onwards, the UK operational

approach in Iraq was shaped by the decision in the UK to commit to an expanded NATO mission

in Afghanistan–regardless of the signs that British forces faced an insurgency in Iraq and required

more, not less, resources. It also assumed that the US approach in Iraq would remain transition-

focused and would not substantially change. The UK's decision to deploy another brigade on a

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[16]The change to force protection measures was so stark that a former CG MND (SE) noted it "split my tour in half." LTG Dutton, Iraq Inquiry, 17-18. Martin Woodhead, *Iran's role in Iraq*, (M.Phil. Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2012), 71. Fairweather, *War of Choice*, 160.

[17]LTG Sanchez to LTG Lamb: "Keep the south quiet" LTG Lamb, Iraq Inquiry, 6.

long-term operation in Helmand Province, Afghanistan pushed the British Army in two directions; it also meant that any change in the operational approach in Iraq would face a critical hearing in London as it would jeopardize the increased commitment to Afghanistan.[18]

Even if the violent Sadr Uprising in summer 2004 was dismissed by PJHQ and subsequent Commanding Generals of MND (SE) as a freak occurrence, as early as 2005 there was no shortage of other evidence that the Iraqi political and security organizations were either incapable, or much worse, could not be trusted. The kidnap of two British soldiers by the Iraqi police in the Jamiat incident in September 2005, and subsequent brigade operation to recover them, exposed in graphic terms the seriousness of insurgent subversion within the UK's would-be local allies.[19] The repeated Iraqi political 'disengagements' that followed from the Basra Provincial Council, and even in neighboring Maysan, underlined the extent of the anti-coalition subversion and the malign influence of the Shia Islamists–particularly the JAM and their associates. If the local security forces kidnapped British soldiers, and were then defended by local Iraqi politicians, there was at least pause for thought that there could be a reliable timetable for Maysan and Basra Provinces to be transitioned to PIC without incurring significant risk to achieving the UK and MNF-I's desired political objectives. However, in London the narrative for UK forces had been set and the military and political authorities were fixed on their chosen course-at the expense of recognizing any signs from Iraq that all was not well:

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[18]The inflexible command climate in London was noted by LTG Shirreff, the incoming CG MND (SE) in Jul 2006, during his pre-deployment visit to PJHQ. LTG Shirreff noted that a significant change in the UK operational approach, such as a surge operation, "was not on the main events list" due to a lack of "appetite" in London. LTG Shirreff, Iraq Inquiry, 14-15; Fairweather, *War of Choice*, 224-225.

[19]Fairweather, *War of Choice*, Chapter 20 'Jamiat', 207-222.

LTG SHIRREFF: My sense was that the overriding, the overriding theme within PJHQ, within London was, as I say, accelerated transition and that the gravity of the situation was not fully appreciated. As I say, the focus was to exit rather than achieving adequate success.[20]

By mid-2006, the new Commanding General MND (SE) was aware, and concerned, by the significant risks associated with pushing on with a time-driven operational approach focused on transition and exit.[21]

During the 2004-2006 period when the UK government became set on transition and withdrawal from Iraq, coupled with a significantly increased role in Afghanistan, the anti-occupation insurgency faced by British troops in Iraq evolved. In 2005, the JAM returned from Iran armed with more sophisticated IEDs that significantly increased the tactical threat to coalition forces operating in the south. The consequences of Shia insurgency in the south were not limited to an increased lethality of threat against UK troops. It also opened a supply line for the same Shia Islamist groups operating in Baghdad (particularly Sadr City) and across central Iraq.[22] The increase in local and national threat caused by Shia Islamists coincided with a political impasse with provincial Iraqi politicians in Basra and Maysan. There was also an apparent chronic unreliability of the ISF (mostly the police) due to Shia Islamist infiltration and influence.[23] In summary, by the end of 2006 there was no shortage of meaningful metrics to suggest that rapid transition to Iraqi control, and UK withdrawal, might not be the best operational approach for achieving a secure, stable democratic Iraq. However, the scope for

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[20]LTG Shirreff, Iraq Inquiry, 10.

[21]LTG Shirreff, Iraq Inquiry, 15.

[22]Fairweather, *War of Choice*, 274.

[23]Fairweather, *War of Choice*, 135-145, 267.

trying new approaches was limited by the broad direction of travel - withdrawal and transition - and the lack of suitable, or available, UK resources. It is in stark contrast to the US experience in 2005-2007.[24]

The narrative of US forces experience in Iraq is better known than that of the UK. Nevertheless, a short summary here is necessary as it highlights the critical period in 2006 when the two largest members of the coalition diverged in their approaches thereby producing dramatic results in 2008. From 2003 to 2005 US forces in Iraq struggled to cope with a consistently difficult operational environment. The unexpected challenges of the occupation ranged from an embryonic anti-occupation insurgency to basic problems of stopping looting and re-establishing law and order. The lack of resources, particularly inadequate force levels driven by Secretary Rumsfeld's 'shock and awe' high-tech approach, was compounded by the equally overwhelmed leadership of the Coalition Provisional Authority. From battalion to division, US commanders had to improvise to meet the conditions in their own areas with little help from government agencies, non-governmental organizations or the United Nations.

By 2005 an operational approach was in place based on reducing the threat to US soldiers by withdrawing from the population into consolidated bases and training the ISF so US forces could transition the fight to their control. In the 2003-2005 period the MNF-I mission and narrative was to contain the violence, move the Iraqi political process forward and focus on a transition to ISF control. It explained the violence as driven by 'former regime elements' rather than a broad-based popular insurgency. From the middle of 2005, when General Casey assumed command of MNF-I, the transition approach continued as did skepticism about the seriousness of

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[24]Fairweather, *War of Choice,* 305. This section notes the stark contrast between the US surge and UK withdrawal noticeable when MG Shaw briefed senior US Generals in Baghdad in mid-February 2007.

the insurgency. However, over time a subtle shift in thinking emerged as Casey's closest advisors responded to feedback from US forces in contact with the population, and the enemy, that their underlying thinking and approach was off the mark. The attack on the Golden Mosque on 23 March 2006 provided the watershed moment within MNF-I when leaders began shifting the narrative to recognize the scale and complexity of the violence across Iraq as something beyond a Baathist, rejectionist insurgency. They were thereby able to begin to reframe their understanding of the environment and therefore their assessment of the problem they faced. By doing so, US forces were able to review and assess their situation, clarify political guidance and consider a new military approach in Iraq.[25]

A combination of different events then coincided to create the overall effect popularly known as 'the Surge'. First, President Bush made the bold decision to increase force levels in Iraq and appoint a new commander. Under General Petraeus, the intellectual shift begun by Gen Casey continued with a new operational approach emphasizing protecting the population, with US forces reversing their previous force posture by redeploying back amongst the people, as a higher priority than training and transitioning to the ISF. Third, the realization within the Sunni community in Al Anbar province, and amongst Iraqi Sunni insurgent leaders previously associated with AQ in Baghdad, that AQ-I was a more serious threat to their communities than US forces was another trend to be exploited. Fourth, the change in political leadership in Baghdad as Prime Minister Nuri Al Makiki's appointment signified the end of many months stalemate and raised the prospect of (something approaching) unified action by MNF-I and the Iraqi

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[25]George W. Casey, Jr. General (Retired). *Strategic Reflections: Operation Iraqi Freedom, July 2004–February 2007* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 2012), 104. Corroborated by private interview with member of General Casey's Commander's Initiative Group, 'CIG', who served from Apr 2004-May 2005 in the J5 and CIG, HQ MNF-I.

government. Despite the acrimonious contemporary debate over which factor was most important in the surge, no-one can deny that conditions in 2007 were significantly improved from 2005. In many parts of the Iraq the violence against MNF from Sunni insurgents had decreased, at least in part due to the Awakening movement, while increased action by conventional and special forces against AQ-I reduced attacks against the Iraqi people. This provided space for the political process to improve and for Prime Minister Nuri Al Maliki to consider addressing the insurgents within the Shia community.[26]

By the beginning of 2007, the outcome of all these factors was UK forces in southern Iraq still committed to executing a coalition strategy that was out of date–in spirit, if not in detail. Why did UK commanders not follow their US counterparts' example by 'reframing the problem' and therefore question the validity of their chosen operational approach and advocate fundamental change? The UK inability, or unwillingness, to officially re-examine the situation in Iraq (to 're-frame the problem') during the period 2004-2006 is the main point of friction that was substantially affected, perhaps even caused, by the peculiar command and control structure and is the main subject of analysis in later sections.

Despite these unfavorable conditions, British commanders attempted some imaginative branch plans within the overall approach of transition and exit directed by PJHQ. Two contrasting operations were conducted by consecutive British Commanding Generals of MND (SE) in 2006-07: Op Sinbad was the UK's 'mini-surge' in Basra in the fall of 2006. It was followed in 2007 by Op Zenith: the final push for transition to Provincial Iraqi Control and withdrawal of British forces from Basra city. The latter was also enabled through a dubious local reconciliation

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[26]Fairweather, *War of Choice*, 298.

initiative brokered with the JAM through negotiations between SIS and a captured JAM leader

(the process became known as the 'Accommodation').[27]

For Op Sinbad, there was no increase in force levels; elements of the Theatre Reserve

(one battalion of infantry) were temporarily deployed to MND (SE) but there was no reversal of

the downward trend as shown in figure 1.1. Of note, MNC-I offered additional forces from the

Corps Reserve; these were declined by PJHQ against the preferences of Commanding General

MND (SE).[28] In practical terms, Op Sinbad attempted a different military approach to achieve the

desired goals in southern Iraq. The concept was to set the conditions for a successful handover to

Iraqi authorities in Basra after the malign influence of the violent actors had been removed or

significantly diminished. In practice, that meant strike operations against the leadership within

the JAM, including operations against individuals in the Shia militia-dominated Iraqi Police,

coupled with 'pulses' into districts within Basra to create employment, restore services and

rebuild public confidence in the fledgling Iraqi state. SINBAD temporarily disrupted some of the

malign Shia Islamist elements within the Basra IPS and the command and control of the JAM in

Basra. The kinetic high point, the destruction of the Jamiat Police station in Christmas 2006, was

an iconic image and operation.[29] However, the effects were not enduing. The wider civilian

resources, and political effort, necessary to capitalize on the tactical 'pulses' did not transpire

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[27]Fairweather, *War of Choice,* 309-310. The 'Accommodation' is still a controversial issue; despite disclosures to the public domain in 2008 it received little scrutiny in public hearings of the Iraq Inquiry and probably featured heavily in the private hearings of the evidence provided by the Commanding Generals of MND (SE) in 2007-08.

[28]LTG Shirreff, Iraq Inquiry, 16, 23-26. Of note, PJHQ did not prevent US funding from being spent in MND (SE) although it prevented extra US troops from being used. Fairweather, *War of Choice,* 272, 274.

[29]For BBC coverage from 2005, see http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6208535.stm and http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_pictures/6208777.stm (accessed 30 July 2013).

thereby significantly reducing the effectiveness of Op Sinbad.[30] Although a necessary step to concentrate more British forces in Basra for Op Sinbad, there were negative consequences in the rest of MND (SE). The decision to withdraw the UK battle-group from Camp Abu Naji near Al Amara, Maysan and 're-posture' along the border with Iran drew criticism for effectively handing the province over to the Sadrists and allowing Camp Abu Naji to be ransacked.[31]

The approach that followed Op Sinbad was also controversial. Under Op Zenith strike operations continued against the JAM but in conjunction with the withdrawal of UK forces from all bases within Basra City. This approach had the conflicting effects of simultaneously degrading the cohesion of JAM leadership in Basra while ceding control of terrain and population to the otherwise harried militia. However, the most controversial aspect of Op Zenith was the decision to engage in dialogue with a captured JAM leader to try to enable transition to provincial Iraqi control, and withdraw British troops, by developing an anti-Iranian Iraqi nationalist constituency within the Shia Islamist militia.[32] The viability of Op Zenith depended significantly on the perception of the operational environment–particularly the nature of the war that was being fought and desirable conflict termination criteria. Critically, the CG MND (SE) at the time defined Basra as "more Palermo than Beirut."[33] In his mind he was facing criminal gangs not an anti-MNF occupation insurgency. In that case, any solution had to be achieved by Iraqi law and order, or a shift in Shia domestic politics, with the presence of a British occupying force now a

[30]LTG Shirreff, Iraq Inquiry, 42-43.

[31]Fairweather, *War of Choice*, 272-274, 291.

[32]Fairweather, *War of Choice*, Chapter 30 'The Deal', 209-128.

[33]LTG Shaw, Iraq Inquiry, 30. Fairweather, *War of Choice*, 305-306.

destabilising factor. The latter narrative was reinforced by the then British Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) who publically stated that the presence of UK forces in Iraq was "part of the problem."[34]

The outcome of Op Zenith was that by the end of 2007 all four provinces in MND (SE) had transitioned to PIC, UK forces had withdrawn from all urban areas in southern Iraq to the 'Contingency Operating Base' at Basra Air Station and all JAM prisoners were released under the 'Accommodation' deal. In practice, UK forces were trapped on the COB with limited situational awareness of their environment or ability to influence the local populace.[35]

By February 2008 the British operational approach had culminated or at least ceded the initiative to the other actors in the environment. The Shia militias, particularly JAM, had strong influence across the south with direct control in Maysan and indirect control in Basra. That latter had become a very unpleasant environment for anyone not interested in living under harsh, yet corrupt, JAM interpretation of Sharia Law. The latter was not a situation that could endure if the Iraqi state had any intention of imposing its authority. Other than withdrawal, the long-term British plan post-Op Zenith was unclear. By the beginning of 2009 some new ideas were emerging within senior circles in MND (SE). A new approach could change the status quo by focusing on training the ISF, predominately the Iraqi Army, under the command of a stronger commander and enable the Iraqi Army to launch an offensive to re-take Basra in 6-12 months' time. That meant accepting JAM control of the south until the Iraqi Army was ready for offensive action in Basra by July 2008. However, it is not clear if this was ever a PJHQ-endorsed approach;

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[34]Gen Dannatt's comments on the presence of UK forces in Iraq: http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/6046888.stm (accessed: 30 July 2013).

[35]Fairweather, *War of Choice*, 317-318, 327-328, 330-331.

ultimately events took a different turn resulting in British forces reacting to the actions of the Iraqi state and their US allies in MNF-I.[36]

The penultimate phase of the British experience in southern Iraq is best defined by being reactive to events driven by other actors in the environment – the Government of Iraq (Prime Minister Maliki); the Iraqi Security Forces; the US leadership of MNC-I; and, not least, the JAM in Basra and in exile in Iran. The critical moment that effectively ended British control of the operation in southern Iraq was the personal intervention of PM Maliki when he launched, and even led, a military operation in March 2008.

Operation 'Charge of the Knights' (COTK) came as a surprise to UK forces in MND (SE) to the extent that the Commanding General was on R&R when it began. However, it was also a surprise at national level–PM Maliki's personal decision to seize the initiative confounded the priorities of General Petraeus and his operational approach that at that time emphasized resolving the threat in Mosul, and the north in general, prior to tackling the south. Regardless of who was caught most flat-footed, the outcome of COTK was eventually a triumph for Prime Minister Maliki. The opening five days for the Iraqi Army were very difficult due to the significant lack of logistic support and prior planning. Of note, the Iraqi Army units from outside Basra were sent into the city with little mapping, intelligence or clear instructions on their task; the local units trained by the UK but without embedded mentors also struggled (newly trained 52 Brigade effectively broke down and the Basra IPS did suspiciously little).[37] Without the agility shown by the coalition, there was a serious risk of operational failure. However, the arrival of

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[36]Fairweather, *War of Choice*, 332-333. Private correspondence with BG (Retired) Richard Iron, British Army.

[37]Fairweather, *War of Choice*, 336. LTG White-Spunner, Iraq Inquiry, 17.

further Iraqi Army units with US embedded mentors in close support, plus further MNC-I supporting assets, were able to set conditions for JAM defeat in Basra. British forces showed initiative in Basra to form new military mentoring teams from troops already in theatre to work in close support to the Iraqi Army while the policy in London caught up with the operational necessity. Over the six weeks, and fourteen phases, that followed, the JAM departed Basra and Maysan Provinces leaving Iraqi units with US, and finally UK, mentors in close support securing the south. This set the conditions for the UK to transition to US leadership in MND (SE), withdraw from Iraq and concentrate on Afghanistan. However, it also left the British Army somewhat shaken by its experience and with little time for formal reflection on its lessons due to the immediate demands of the escalating conflict in Afghanistan.[38]

The next section examines the coalition and UK command and control framework in Iraq to establish the key features of the structure itself and to identify any issues it caused. After establishing the basic command and control architecture a detailed analysis is conducted assessing its impact on problem framing and the development of an effective operational approach drawing on the first-hand accounts provided by British General Officers to the Iraq Inquiry. This detailed analysis of the relationship between command and control, problem framing, and operational art is followed by conclusions and wider implications.

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[38]The wider context for the British military leaving Iraq was the unexpectedly high tempo, and casualty rate, of operations in Afghanistan. For example, during the UK's final period in Iraq in 2009, their comrades in Afghanistan suffered 108 fatalities. For official figures, see https://www.gov.uk/uk-forces-operations-in-afghanistan (accessed 8 Aug 2013). To date, UK forces in Afghanistan have sustained the second highest casualty rate within ISAF; see Andrew R Hoehn and Sarah Harting, *Risking NATO: Testing the Limits of the Alliance in Afghanistan* (Santa Monica, CA; RAND, 2010), 51.

COALITION AND NATIONAL COMMAND AND CONTROL FRAMEWORK FOR UK FORCES IN SOUTHERN IRAQ

The command and control framework for MND (SE) does not fit neatly in to the 'integrated', 'lead nation', or 'parallel' models as specified in US or UK doctrine. The evidence in this section examines the extent to which the command and control structure provided sufficient clarity to achieve unity of command and effort. It concludes that the UK command and control framework did not do so; instead it inadvertently created a flawed structure that decreased the effectiveness of British forces in southern Iraq and increased the risk of divergent approaches within the coalition. The key issue was PJHQ's decision to act as the operational headquarters for UK forces in MND (SE). Although no harm was intended, the impact of this decision adversely affected the ability of UK forces in southern Iraq to understand their environment, reframe the problem and integrate their efforts with the overall US-led operational approach due to their subordination to a campaign run from PJHQ over 3,000 miles away from Iraq.

The effects of the UK command and control structure were not limited to MND (SE). A second unintended consequence was the creation of a perspective amongst US forces in Baghdad that MND (SE) was a separate British area somehow detached from the rest of MNF-I. The command and control structure thereby set the conditions for path dependency to develop as US officers in Baghdad became used to not paying particular heed to developments in southern Iraq as it was perceived as a British area. Consequently, they did not grasp the wider significance for the whole of Iraq of the intra-Shia power struggle between the Sadrists and their opponents and the extent of malign influence from Iran.

Figure 1.2 UK and Coalition Chain of Command, Iraq.

Source: Author's own diagram based on Ministry of Defence declassified sources.[39]

The UK contributed the lion's share of troops, command and control, and leadership of

MND (SE) but was not operating unilaterally in southern Iraq. At the high water mark there were

forces from over twenty nations within MND (SE); in terms of ground forces, a brigade from the

Italian army, Danish, Australian, and Dutch battalions were all present during some stage of the

period of UK leadership of MND (SE). The Italian force was deployed to Dhi Qar Province and

the Dutch, followed by the Australian, battalion to Al Muthanna Province; this force laydown

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[39]Diagram based on declassified diagram of UK command and control structure for Op
Telic, email MOD Corporate Memory Team, 7 May 2013.

effectively made those provinces mini-national areas of operations. In contrast, the Danish

battalion was integrated into the British brigade in Basra.[40]

This structure was far from a model of clarity and precision (see figure 1.2). MND (SE)

was a mix of parallel and integrated chain of command models at the tactical echelon–not the

ideal structure for identifying and tracking insurgent threats across boundaries or achieving a

common understanding and operational approach. Even so, the preponderance of British ground

troops, plus the Commanding General and staff, made the UK operational approach the dominant,

if not exclusive, theme influencing tactical actions in southern Iraq.

Looking up to the operational echelon, the picture was no clearer and probably worse for

a coherent coalition operational approach. On paper, MND (SE) was a Multi-National Division

under the command of the US-led MNF-I and MNC-I in Baghdad. At the senior command level,

MND (SE) was in practice a British area essentially operating as a 'Parallel', rather than an

'Integrated', chain of command. Parallel is the more accurate model in practice; despite the

presence of other coalition members as staff officers, and for a period as Deputy Commander, due

to the existence of the separate national operational echelon of command in the UK–PJHQ

relationship, the UK perspective and approach was dominant. According to the testimony of the

early Commanding Generals of MND (SE), it was certainly perceived as such by the US

commanders in Baghdad who saw MND (SE) as a 'Brit area' rather than as an integral part of the

entire theatre (and therefore a place that US leaders needed to take a strong interest in).[41]

The command relationships as understood by the UK MoD are illustrated in figure 1.2.

Of note, UK forces were 'OPCOM' to PJHQ and only 'TACON' to US forces. For the UK

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[40]MG Stewart, Iraq Inquiry, 26. Sir Hilary Synnott, Iraq Inquiry, 46.

[41]MG Stewart, Iraq Inquiry, 24, 27; LTG Lamb, Iraq Inquiry, 6.

elements in MND (SE), PJHQ was expected to provide and direct the operational approach; this framework marginalized MNF-I.[42] It is the root of the problem identified earlier by Col Mansoor: the UK-led campaign in Basra responded to direction from London rather than 'nesting into the Multi-National Force-Iraq campaign.' This is the critical issue; by retaining UK forces at 'OPCOM', PJHQ officially placed itself as the operational echelon in London rather than allowing UK forces in Iraq to integrate and synchronize with the US-led coalition in Baghdad. This reinforced the US perception that the MND (SE) was somehow separate from the rest of MNF-I and increased the likelihood they would give less attention to southern Iraq. As a result, the impact of developments in southern Iraq–such as malign Iranian influence, the influx of sophisticated IED technology, and, the economic and political power base for the Shia insurgency–were much less well understood in Baghdad than would otherwise have been the case. In the long run, this *de facto*separation of UK forces in MND (SE) risked increasing friction within the coalition as divergent approaches emerged.

To understand the tension within the UK operational approach in southern Iraq, four key relationships stand out: first, between the US-led HQ MNF-I, and HQ MNC-I, in Baghdad with HQ MND (SE) in Basra; second, the UK national chain of command PJHQ in London to the UK Commanding General and key staff of MND (SE); third, the bilateral relationship between PJHQ and HQ MNF-I; fourth, the interaction between PJHQ and the MOD (see figure 1.4). The latter in turn hinted at a fifth factor as the MOD engaged with the Pentagon over general policy, strategy,

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[42]The applicable UK joint doctrine when Op Telic began was Joint Warfare Publication 0-10, 'United Kingdom Doctrine for Joint and Multinational Operations', Sept 1999. It directed that the UK Joint Commander had extensive responsibilities for deployed UK forces committed to a coalition war; this included: providing a mission directive; establishing command and control; establishing the intelligence structure; determining the appropriate rules of engagement; recommending the media engagement policy to the MOD; liaison with the rest of the coalition. See JWP 0-10, 5-7, paragraph 511.

and resources for Iraq and Afghanistan. If the dynamics of these four relationships became heated, or deteriorated into disagreement, there was significant risk of divergent approaches developing within the coalition. By committing UK forces in MND (SE) to MNF-I at OPCOM, and to only allow the US to have TACON, significant control was retained by PJHQ over the mission, structure, and approach for UK forces in Iraq.

This structure placed significant pressure on the UK commander, and staff, of HQ MND (SE) to prevent any divergence of perspectives, priorities, and approaches from occurring. They were responsible for providing situational awareness to separate higher headquarters in different countries, responding to their direction and priorities while overseeing the difficult business of day-to-day operations in southern Iraq. Perhaps more importantly, HQ MND (SE) was the in-theatre focal point for grappling with an ill-structured, constantly changing, unfamiliar problem in southern Iraq. Flexibility and adaptation, intellectual as much as physical, were likely to be key qualities necessary for success.

Flexibility for CG MND (SE) and a strong role for PJHQ were likely to be mutually exclusive factors. The UK's command and control structure placed MND (SE) under the primary control of an organization 3,450 miles away, thereby limiting its ability to respond to the changing environment and evolving campaign as directed by MNF-I. In practical terms this command state prevented MNF-I from directly enforcing a decision on UK forces in MND (SE) should it clash with the direction from PJHQ or the MOD. In each case, the decision may have seemed small but in the long term cause substantial issues. For example, the MNF-I approach to embed trainers directly with ISF units was not followed in MND (SE) as PJHQ and the MoD decided against it, at least in part, due to perceptions of excessive risk to force protection. In the long run this proved counter-productive as it indirectly undermined the overall approach that emphasized the rapid development of the ISF's capability and enable transition, and exit, of UK

forces. The decision was reversed during Operation Charge of the Knights as experience demonstrated creating embedded training teams was the more effective approach.[43]

Overall, the command and control structure caused excessive friction. Instead of being able to adapt and direct subordinate forces on their own authority and initiative, MNF-I and MNC-I had to engage with PJHQ to agree any change to the operational approach. While they may have intermittently found consensus, this structure was unlikely to generate a tempo of decision-making that could readily respond to opportunities in Iraq to seize the initiative from the insurgents. At worst, it risked divergent understandings of key issues–such as the nature of the conflict; the existence of an insurgency; how best to train the Iraqi Security Forces; the true meaning of 'Provincial Iraqi Control'; and, how to approach conflict termination with the insurgents. Finally, on a purely practical level unless it changed its working hours to commit key staff to Iraq 24-7 then it was unlikely to meet the challenge-especially in a crisis.[44] The next section explores the central command and control issue in greater depth by analyzing the extent of the quasi lead nation-parallel command and control structure's influence on problem-framing and operational art in southern Iraq. It begins by analyzing the views of the British Generals who commanded in Iraq– to what extent was the command and control structure viewed as adequate, helpful or harmful.

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[43]General Dannatt, Iraq Inquiry, 30-31. Fairweather, *War of Choice,*337.

[44]Lack of senior officer availability in PJHQ during the early period of Op COTK proved a problem for BG Free who was unable to gain access to anyone more senior than a Captain at a key early stage of the operation. Fairweather, *War of Choice*, 335.

ANALYSIS: BRITISH GENERAL OFFICERS ASSESS THE COMMAND AND CONTROL
FRAMEWORK

Before analyzing the views of the thirteen General Officers who commanded in Basra, it

is essential to recognize a central problem that reduced their ability to become experts: the high

turnover of UK commanders, and their supporting staff, compared to US Commanding General

of MNF-I (see figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3 Comparison of Commanding General tour intervals: Basra and Baghdad.
Source: Author's own diagram based on evidence provided to the Iraq Inquiry.

In this context, it is hard to see how any of the Commanding Generals could ever have become

capable of understanding the long terms trends within their area. This lack of continuity was not

mitigated by PJHQ; as already noted by LTG Lamb, and will be explored in more detail below,

PJHQ itself was dependent on the quantity and quality of information provided by the in-theatre

commanders. With this framework, it is hard to see how UK forces could reasonably have expected to be tactically effective, let alone have their own campaign run by a UK-based operational echelon located 3,450 miles away and dependent for its situational awareness on an in-theatre headquarters in Basra with a very high turnover of commanders and staff.

The testimony provided to the Iraq Inquiry by the thirteen UK General Officers who commanded MND (SE) indicates that the command and control framework was a cause of concern, and friction, during the campaign. Of note, only two CGs were completely content with the command and control structure that placed them under the operational control of Commander Joint Operations (CJO) in the UK and also under the command of the US CG of MNF-I in Baghdad. The remainder all expressed difficulties with the structure and identified the challenge for PJHQ in providing an operational echelon of command for UK forces that was up to task of commanding British forces in Iraq. Significantly, the final two UK Commanding Generals who served in Iraq in 2008 explicitly described their understanding of their role commanding MND (SE) as directly under the US commander of MNC-I in Baghdad rather than following a UK operational approach directed from PJHQ in London. When broadened to include General Officers who served in MOD Operations/Commitments Branch, the figures still indicate concerns with command and control (see figures 1.4, 1.5, 1.6).

Figure 1.4. UK General Officer posts and locations for Op Telic.

Source: Author's own diagram based on General Officer statements to the Iraq Inquiry.

Deductions:

*The majority of UK General Officers identified a significant problem with C2 at the operational level and attributed it to the complexity of the dual framework.

*PJHQ was identified as the organisation that was unable to provide the necessary continuity for the UK operational approach.

*Of the five General Officers who were 'content' with the C2 framework, two expressed their views in the context of primarily working for the US CG of MNC-I and not for CJO in PJHQ.

*The testimony from the CGs indicates the flaw in integration and coherence between the UK and US campaigns caused by the inadequacy of the UK's operational echelon – particularly from 2006 when it prioritised Afghanistan above Iraq.

*Integrated C2 framework is a better structure than a dual option. An integrated C2 framework was ultimately achieved in practice by 2008-09 as the final CGs MND (SE) explicitly interpreted their role as closer to US-led MNC-I than to PJHQ.

VIEWS ON C2 FRAMEWORK, 2003-09

- IDENTIFIED C2 AS UNSATISFACTORY (1)
- DESCRIBED SIGNIFICANT PROBLEMS, OR CONFUSION, ASSOCIATED WITH C2 (7)
- CONTENT/NO CONCERNS WITH C2 (5)

Figure 1.5. UK General Officer views on command and control framework.

Source: Author's own diagram based on General Officer statements to the Iraq Inquiry.
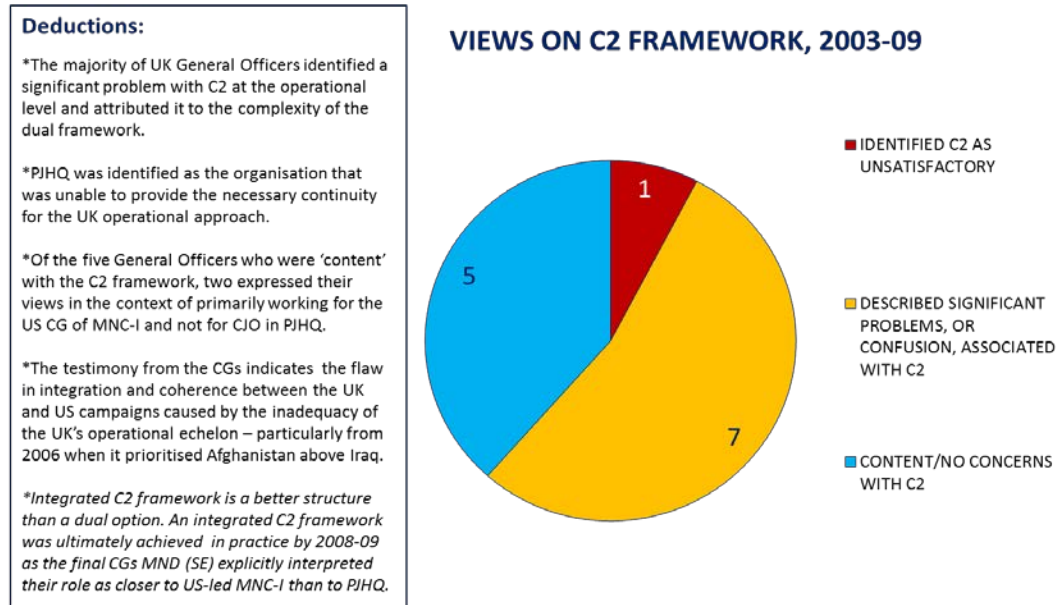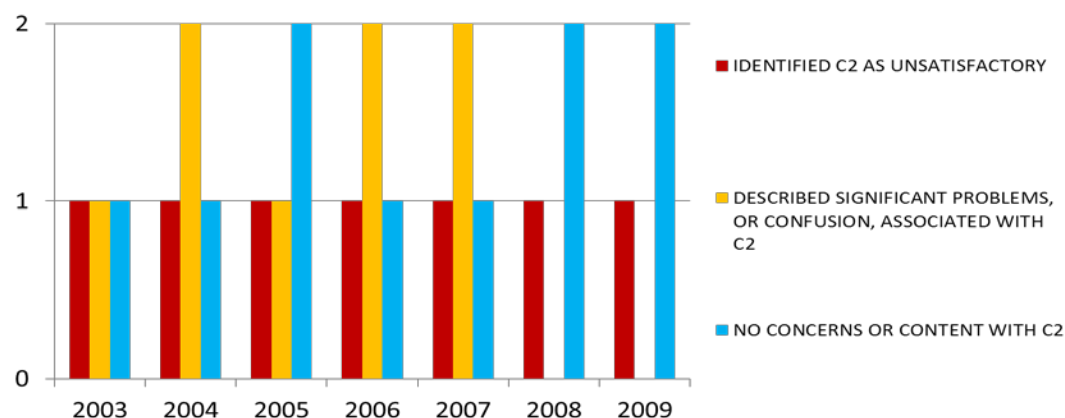
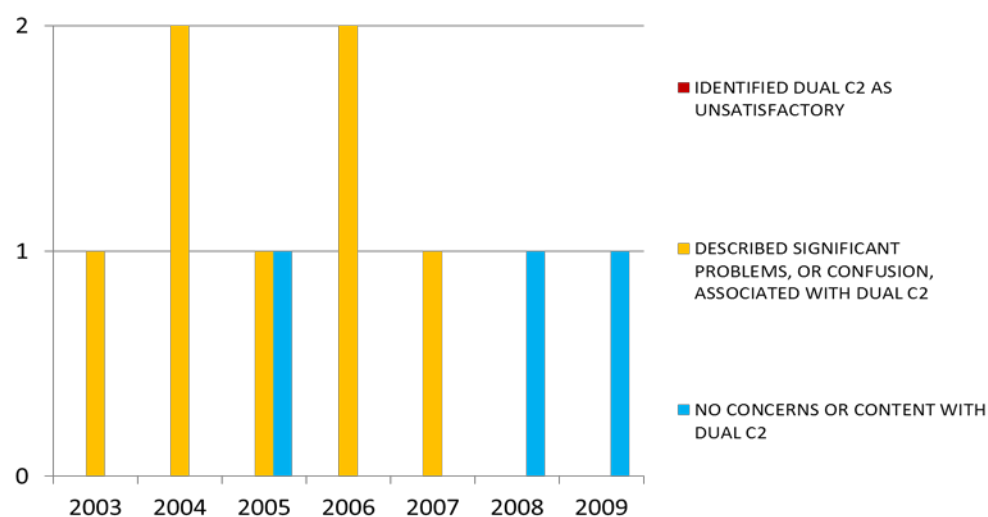Figure 1.6. UK General Officer views on command and control framework by year.

Source: Author's own diagram based on General Officer statements to the Iraq Inquiry.

Figure 1.7. UK CGs of MND(SE) only: views on command and control framework, 2003-09.

Source: Author's own diagram based on General Officer statements to the Iraq Inquiry.

The testimony of General Officers at the Iraq Inquiry includes several officers who served in Iraq in more than one capacity and also in the UK at the operational and national policy levels–PJHQ and the MOD respectively. Intriguingly, the two General Officers who served consecutively as Deputy Chief of the Defence Staff (DCDS) for Commitments/Operations held diametrically opposed views on the soundness of the dual command and control framework for UK forces in Iraq (as shown at figures 1.6 and 1.7).

LTG Fry served as DCDS (Commitments) from 2003 to 2006 before handing over to Gen Wall. The former explicitly stated that the command and control framework was sub-optimal for a smooth US-UK campaign and could have been improved to achieve an integrated coalition operational approach:

> LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Yes. There were criticisms of who actually commanded MND South East, and was it the American general in Baghdad, or was it the Chief of Joint Operations in Northwood, or was it the CDS in London, or was it the cacophony of noise that was around him in Basra. I think one of the great clarities of the American military system is the simplicity and accountability of their chains of command. I don't think they felt they saw the same thing on our side.
> SIR RODERIC LYNE: What did you feel? Did we have insufficient clarity of command?
> LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I felt they were right.
> SIR RODERIC LYNE: They were right. So of these different elements, which was the nearest to being the driving force, in your view?
> LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: Of the diminution of our influence?
> SIR RODERIC LYNE: Of the command in the south-east. You said the Americans were unclear as to who commanded. Who was the prime commander, in your view? Was it the man on the spot? Was he being second guessed and micromanaged from Northwood, from Whitehall or what?
> LT GEN SIR ROBERT FRY: I think it was a combination of all those things. I think there was less discretion given to the local commander than the Americans would have expected, and there was less automaticity in the way that he responded to the direction from Baghdad than they would have expected inside their own system.[45]

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[45]LTG Fry, Iraq Inquiry, 107-109.

A key issue here is responsiveness, unity and coherence. LTG Fry noted the US desire for a more responsive subordinate formation thereby achieving unity of effort if not direct unity of command. This idea of coherence and unity goes further than the narrow technical point of tactical responsiveness to new direction. In Iraq, the coalition faced a tough challenge in seizing back the initiative and even just trying to improve its understanding of the deteriorating political and security situation. Those two challenges became even harder if the underlying command and control lacked coherence and indirectly encouraged divergence.

LTG Fry was clear that the command and control framework was not effective but his successor, Gen Wall, took the opposite view. When asked directly for his views on LTG Fry's perspective on the command and control structure he disagreed that it was unsound or unworkable. Gen Wall noted the perennial difficulties in coalition command and control and the risks inherently caused by parallel national command and control structures creating divergent operational approaches. However, he denied it caused any problems in practice and described the extensive liaison officer network he used to make it fit for purpose in Iraq.

> SIR RODERIC LYNE: But in effect, the GOC MND South East had two bosses, one in London and one in Baghdad. If those two bosses didn't agree, what did he do? GEN SIR PETER WALL: One in Northwood, speaking strictly –
> SIR RODERIC LYNE: Well, sorry, one in the UK and one in Baghdad.
> GEN SIR PETER WALL: -- and one in Baghdad. It was our job to ensure that though the national ambitions and aspirations and the coalition objectives hopefully, as the campaign progressed, reflected through Iraqi wishes rather than just the Multi National coalition lead, that those aligned.
> SIR RODERIC LYNE: But there must have been some occasions when they didn't. If push came to shove, which one won?
> GEN SIR PETER WALL: It depended on the issue. This is the nature of coalition warfare, and, you know, I'm not a historian, but some of you know more about this than I do, this has always been an interesting challenge for people on the ground to solve. ......
> GEN SIR PETER WALL: Yes, I think so, but it did require engagement and liaison at a number of levels and in number of places to ensure that all of that remained, you know, on the right bearing and that included Jon and I engaging in Washington, it included CJO's liaison officers in Tampa in Florida, in Central Command. It involved a number of British officers in the force headquarters with General Petraeus and in the corps headquarters with the various corps commanders, where we had the deputy command

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appointments and a number of other staff in key planning roles. So the ability to apply checks and balances to any potential divergences of aspiration was good.[46]

Clearly, LTG Fry and Gen Wall disagreed on this issue. Examination of the views of the other Commanding Generals of MND (SE) on command and control and PJHQ suggests that LTG Fry's perspective is closer to the mark (see figure 1.7). If Gen Wall's assertion that the command and control structure was essentially functional (due to the hard work by the extensive British liaison network) then it is hard to see why command and control was cited by so many former CG MND (SE) as a problem. Figure 1.6 shows that 8 out of 13 former Commanding Generals were explicitly dissatisfied or conveyed some degree of frustration with it while only 2 argued it was fit for purpose. This suggests there was a significant problem with PJHQ as the operational echelon.

In practical terms the capability of the UK's *de facto* separate national command and control structure in Iraq can be assessed by the ability of PJHQ to provide meaningful direction, expertise, insight, and campaign coherence to the various Division Commanders and Staffs who rotated every 6-7 months through HQ MND (SE). According to the evidence provided to the Iraq Inquiry, from summer 2003 onwards PJHQ's ability to do so was predominately poor (albeit with one dissenting view from LTG Riley).

LTG Lamb, CG MND (SE) Jul-Dec 2003, stated that his daily interaction with PJHQ was based on written reports and returns with verbal communication between he and CJO limited to conversations every 3 weeks. He assessed PJHQ as poorly placed to provide any insight, understanding or direction to him or his staff: "the support I could get from London was -- and PJHQ was limited. They were even more in the dark than I was."[47]

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[46]General Wall, Iraq Inquiry, 4-7.

[47]LTG Lamb, Iraq Inquiry, 8.

An atypical view (the only one out of thirteen CGs to explicitly express complete

satisfaction with PJHQ and the command and control framework) came from LTG Riley, CG

MND (SE) from Dec 04-Jun 05:

> LTG RILEY: I was very, very happy with what I got from the PJHQ. If I asked a
> question, I received an answer and I never had any doubt about what I should ask to the
> PJHQ and what I should ask to my commander, General Casey, on the ground who was
> after all responsible for the conduct of operations. I never lost any sleep over that.[48]

The majority of CGs MND (SE) did not report the same confidence in the command and control

framework (or personal quality of life). After serving as CG MND (SE) in 2006, and

subsequently as Senior British Military Representative-Iraq (SBMR-I) in Baghdad in 2008 under

US General Petraeus, General Cooper was clear that the PJHQ position as operational echelon

had not worked well:

> LTG COOPER: And if I had a comment that I have given before to military analysis, it is
> that the continuity of command from Permanent Joint Headquarters, for example, could
> have been, I think, slightly tighter. And there is perhaps a confusion between what we
> call mission command -- tell me what to do but not how to do it -- and this very central
> operational-level continuity of command that I think across the piece could have been
> better…..But the operational commander, the British operational commander was in
> Permanent Joint Headquarters -- this is not a criticism of an individual, it's of an
> institution because there were several people involved. I think the continuity of command
> and direction could have been slightly tighter to avoid these slight shifts, and sometimes
> quite significant shifts actually, between one commander and the next, compounded by
> short tour lengths.[49]

This theme of PJHQ not adding value as an operational echelon capable of providing insight,

understanding and campaign coherence for UK forces in Basra continued with the testimony of

UK Commanding Generals from 2006 and 2007. LTG Shaw, CG MND (SE) Jan to Aug 07,

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[48]LTG Riley, Iraq Inquiry, 29-30.

[49]LTG Cooper, Iraq Inquiry, 46.

recognized the complexities of coalition operations and suggested a different approach to

command and control as a preferable option:

> LTG SHAW: I think this was a standard coalition operation, so it had all the complexities there involved. My own personal view on this -- and I have had this debate with the then CJO -- was that there would have been -- it would have made my job easier, as the deployed British two-star, had there been a more permanent British voice in Baghdad, arguing our case within the Corps, and there was a standard issue here and I'm sure they will have told you but -- and it is very much personality-dependent because the man up there, the British representative up there, had two roles, and it is a question of which role it is…[50]

Finally, the view of last two UK Commanding Generals, LTG White-Spunner (CG MND (SE)

Jan-Aug 08) and MG Salmon (CG MND (SE) Aug 08 – Mar 09), was that their role was

primarily as a commander subordinate to the US CG of MNC-I rather than as the executor of

PJHQ's operational approach conceived and driven from the UK. White-Spunner emphasized this

point to the Iraq Inquiry:

> LTG WHITE-SPUNNER: My boss was American, my orders were from General Austin, and through him from General Petraeus. We were very much part of the corps, and although I would talk obviously to the headquarters in Northwood and occasionally, when asked to do so, to ministers and officials here, the operational -- my orders were coming very much from General Austin.[51]

No formal change in the command and control framework had been made in 2008; the

implication from LTG White-Spunner is that his interpretation of who his primary superior was,

or at least where the priority should lie, had shifted from the UK and PJHQ to the US-led

coalition in Baghdad. This local reinterpretation of command relationships provides two insights:

first, the separate UK national operational echelon had effectively failed by 2008–at least as it

was originally intended to function. Second, the closer integration of UK and US forces in 2008

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[50]LTG Shaw, Iraq Inquiry, 44-45.

[51]LTG White-Spunner, Iraq Inquiry, 30.

may be an indicator of the best practice for command and control in a coalition counter-insurgency campaign as the results produced by the combined efforts of Iraqi, US and UK forces in 2008 significantly improved the conditions in Basra and Maysan Provinces in line with the overall coalition operational approach.

Overall, analysis of the evidence provided by the UK Commanding Generals of MND (SE) indicates that the chosen command and control framework was a problem–regardless of the best intentions and professionalism of everyone concerned. It is significant that every Commanding General chose to comment on the command and control framework; the same cannot be said about intelligence, cultural awareness, rules of engagement, or sustainment. The testimony from the final two commanders is telling as their relative contentment with the command and control arrangement was based on their interpretation of it as placing them under the de facto operational control of the US CG of MNC-I rather than of PJHQ in the UK: in effect, creating an integrated rather than parallel, or lead nation, structure. Significantly, 2008 probably saw the strongest integration of US and UK forces in southern Iraq and the best successes in the campaign–Op COTK and the subsequent establishment of government of Iraq and ISF control of the south. It is in stark contrast to the earlier period in 2003-04 when the US CG of MNF-I treated the south as a de facto national UK area in which he showed little or no interest provided it remained quiet. This suggests that an integrated command and control structure would have been more effective in ensuring campaign coherence and continuity, for senior and junior parties, had it been designed and agreed from the start. Did the command and control framework provide a strong mechanism for understanding the environment then deciding and communicating on a clear operational approach? Analysis of the evidence provided to the Iraq Inquiry of the thirteen UK commanding generals suggests that it did not.

ANALYSIS: PROBLEM-FRAMING, RE-FRAMING THE PROBLEM AND THE
OPERATIONAL APPROACH

The difficulty of the challenge of achieving a common understanding of the problem facing the coalition in Iraq, and then developing a coherent operational approach, should not be underestimated – particularly in the already murky world of counter-insurgency. In this form of warfare, one of the basic difficulties is simply identifying who the adversaries are and the nature of their political goals in relation to local allies and your own force. This assessment is then subject to significant internal and external scrutiny as it becomes the foundation for the operational approach attempting to defeat the insurgency.

Although terms such as 'problem-framing', 're-framing the problem' and 'design' are relatively new, they draw on ideas and techniques well-known to British forces in 2003. The philosophy and doctrine of the UK military encapsulated the need to begin with analysis and understanding. The opening question of the British Army's Combat Estimate (commonly known as the Seven Questions) 'what is the situation and how does it affect me?' immediately focuses commanders, and staffs, on analysis before determining appropriate actions.[52] In Iraq, was there a structural problem that made this process less effective? Did the command and control framework hinder this fundamental conceptual step in developing a sound, but adaptable, operational approach? The answer lies in analysis of the dynamics between London and Basra caused by the command and control structure.

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[52]British Army Doctrine Publication, *Operations* (London, UK: Ministry of Defence, 2010), 6-16. Available online: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/army-doctrine-publication-operations (accessed: 9 Aug 2013).

Within the British military there were four key posts central to the understanding of the problem facing the coalition and UK forces in Iraq: CG MND (SE) in Basra; the UK 3-Star General Officer appointed Deputy Commander MNF-I in Baghdad; Commander Joint Operations (CJO) in PJHQ, London; and Deputy Chief of Defence Staff Operations (DCDS Ops) in MOD Main Building, London (shown earlier in figure 1.4). All four were experienced General Officers of a similar peer group with extensive operational and tactical experience of counter-insurgency and peace-keeping (less CJO, Air Chief Marshall Sir Glenn Torpy, an RAF fighter pilot). However, only one, CG MND (SE), had regular direct contact with the Iraqi people in southern Iraq and could claim to have a commander's feel for the dynamics of his patch. The command and control framework placed significant pressure on the Commanding General and staff of MND (SE) to provide a clear appreciation of their operational environment to multiple audiences– all under the daily pressure of fighting the insurgency and meeting different political expectations in Baghdad, Washington D.C., and London. As already noted, short tours and high turnover of commanders did not help generate expertise.

In this context it should come as no surprise at the lack of consensus amongst British commanders on the critical question of the nature of the conflict in which they were engaged. From their testimony to the Iraq Inquiry, there was a wide range of views on the problem each commander faced in MND (SE) and the type of conflict they were involved in. These diverse views are illustrated at figures 1. 8 and 1.9 below.

PROBLEM-FRAMING BY CG MND(SE), 2003-09

Deductions:

*A wide range of views existed amongst the CGs on the nature of their environment and the problem they faced.

*There was a reluctance to call the conflict an insurgency; no-one called it a civil war.

*Conflicting concepts were articulated by at least two CGs.

*There is no sign of continuity of analysis, assessment and visualisation across the campaign: a flaw at the operational echelon.

- ANTI-OCCUPATION INSURGENCY
- CRIMINALITY
- TRIBAL VIOLENCE
- POLITICAL VIOLENCE
- DISAPPOINTED EXPECTATIONS
- POOR or DETERIORATING SECURITY/ ESCALATING VIOLENCE

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Figure 1.8. Overall factors identified by Commanding Generals MND (SE) to explain their understanding of the 'problem' they faced, July 2003 to August 2009.

Source: Author's own diagram based on General Officer statements to the Iraq Inquiry.

- ANTI-OCCUPATION INSURGENCY
- POOR or DETERIORATING SECURITY SITUATION/ESCALATING VIOLENCE
- CRIMINALITY
- TRIBAL VIOLENCE
- POLITICAL VIOLENCE
- DISAPPOINTED EXPECTATIONS

Deductions:
- There is a degree of correlation in assessment by CGs with the known events in their AO in their period of command e.g. the deterioration of security in 05-06. However, here is no overall consistency of views ,or a steady evolution, based on changing circumstances over time.
- The strongest divergence is in seeing the conflict as an insurgency: only 3 CGs describe it as 'COIN' – one in 2004, one in 2005 and the final CG in 2009. Three describe conditions of political violence but do not label it insurgency or civil war.
- One CG in 2007 (Gen Shaw) simultaneously holds dissonant views: criminality and political violence but does not label it 'insurgency'.
- The overall conceptual inconsistency suggests a lack of coherence at the operational echelon of command above CG MND(SE) i.e. at PJHQ.
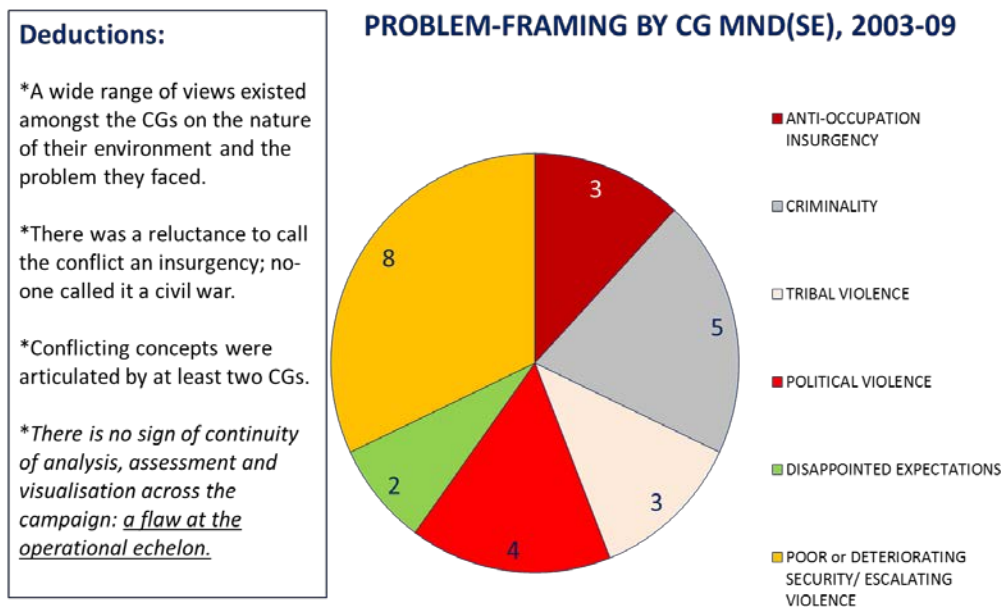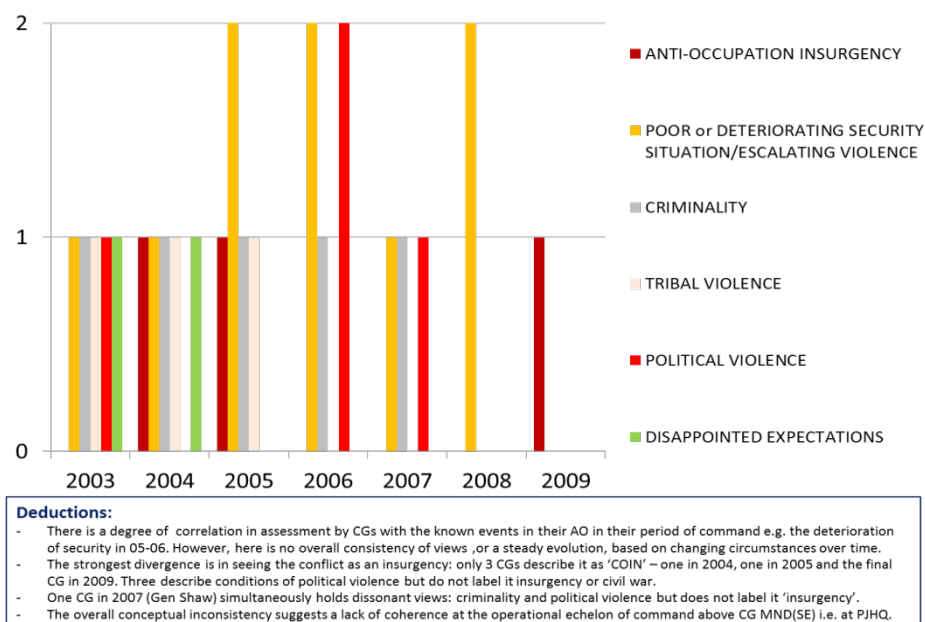
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Figure 1.9. Factors identified by Commanding Generals MND (SE) to explain their understanding of the 'problem' they faced, July 2003 to August 2009, depicted year by year.

Source: Author's own diagram based on General Officer statements to the Iraq Inquiry.

The evidence given by twelve of the General Officers who commanded MND (SE) in Basra provides fascinating insights into command in a modern counter-insurgency conflict. From the perspective of problem framing and campaign coherence it is significant that there were so many of them–two per year. No matter the skills and experience of the General Officers concerned, this high turnover of leadership (double the rate of US Division Commanders as they were on 12 month tours[53]) was likely to hurt campaign continuity. It placed great emphasis on the operational HQ in London, PJHQ, to provide a coherent understanding of the operational environment for each new CG and his staff.

Analysis of the testimony of the UK Commanding Generals highlights six factors most commonly used to describe their understanding of the environment and problem they faced when they took command in Basra. They are: anti-occupation insurgency; political violence; escalating violence/a poor or deteriorating security situation; the disappointed material expectations of the local populace; criminality; and tribal violence. The results show the lack of coherence, rigor and depth in UK thinking throughout the conflict. If there was a coherent understanding and consistent operational approach in MND (SE), under the dual direction of PJHQ in London and MNC-I in Baghdad, then something approaching a logical progression through those factors would be expected. For example, an initial period of criminality, tribal violence, and disappointed expectations followed by a poor, deteriorating security situation leading to an understanding that

[53]Tour lengths within US forces were not uniform: USMC forces served shorted tours than their US Army counterparts. In general, US forces served longer than British forces.

what had evolved was political violence and even an anti-occupation insurgency. It is not likely that any organization could achieve a clear, linear narrative to explain its environment whilst involved in the heat of daily conflict. It does not follow that an incoherent assessment with contradictions in its internal logic is inevitable, yet that is exactly the picture of the UK understanding of southern Iraq that emerges.

As shown in figures 1.8 and 1.9, three Commanding Generals acknowledged they were in a counter-insurgency campaign but there is no logical pattern to their views–they served in 2004, 2005, and then 2009 not consecutively. Three other Commanding Generals described conditions of insurgency and civil war but were not able, or willing, to name it as anything more than political violence. Another Commanding General from 2007 (LTG Shaw) rhetorically asked the question 'did we face an insurgency in the south' before describing conditions exactly consistent with that form of violence: nationalist anti-occupation irregular forces with an external sponsor trying to expel his own army. However, he did not answer his own question and later expressed a contradictory position. The views of the same Commanding General illustrate the inconsistency in the British understanding of the environment, with implications for the coherence of the operational approach, by holding conflicting views on this critical, fundamental issue. After his extensive discussion on the complex political motivations of the Shia militias in Basra, and their links to Iran, he conversely stated that criminality was at the root of the violence by using the analogy 'Basra is more Palermo than Beirut' to frame the problem.[54] This is a clear example of cognitive dissonance and highlights the intellectual confusion that had emerged in senior British circles by 2007.

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[54]LTG Shaw, Iraq Inquiry, 30.

Evidence from three other Commanding Generals from the 2004 to 2005 period suggests

that the problem did not lie with any single General Officer but with the underlying framework

that placed so much emphasis for campaign continuity on the UK operational echelon in PJHQ.

MG Stewart was Commanding General MND (SE) in 2004 during the Sadr Rising. With

hindsight, this was the beginning of a distinct Shia extremist anti-occupation insurgency under the

overall guidance and inspiration, but not direct personal control, of Muqtada Al Sadr. MG

Stewart used the term 'insurgency' and 'counter-insurgency' to describe his experience in Iraq.

He was also very clear on the significance of the sudden, fundamental change to local politics and

security caused by the conflict with Sadr:

> MG STEWART: I woke up on the morning of 6 April and I moved from probably third gear to way over six. Just all of us -- this was a completely different day and it was like a switch had been flicked. We woke up on the 6th there were 35 shooting incidents and attacks in Basra before 7.30 in the morning. Nasiriyah had been taken over by the Mahdi army, they had taken all the bridges, they had control of the city. In Al Amarah, there was running battles going on with the security forces."[55]

Yet the next British Commanding General took a completely different view on the nature

of the conflict in his environment. When explaining his understanding of the conflict in Iraq as a

whole and in MND (SE) in particular LTG Rollo specifically rejected the idea of a Shia

insurgency and instead emphasized non-political causes of violence and instability–criminality

and tribal fighting:

> LTG ROLLO: In the south, when I arrived, it was basically quiet…..So there wasn't, or shouldn't have been, any question of a sort of Shia insurrection. But, of course, the politics were completely immature and the Shia disagreed with each other, whether that was the Sadrists and Badr in Al-Amarah, or different political factions within Basra itself or, indeed, disagreements between the various governors and Baghdad. And on top of that, there was good old-fashioned tribal fighting particularly in the criminal gangs north of Basra, and there was straight criminality as well…. I didn't feel there was general

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[55]MG Stewart, Iraq Inquiry, 67-68.

opposition, certainly not to the extent of a general feeling that we shouldn't be there and that that justified armed attack on us.[56]

This pattern of inconsistency continues across all twelve Commanding Generals. What is clear is that even for a confused and ever-changing situation in a very tough conflict, the British military was far from consistent in its own analysis and narrative of the problem it faced in Iraq. The responsibility for this erratic performance in large part must sit with PJHQ as the UK's designated operational echelon. At the time, a useful measurement of the effectiveness of PJHQ as the operational command echelon for British forces in Iraq could have been its ability to provide continuity of knowledge and expertise for successive tactical commander in Basra Yet the testimony of Generals Stewart and Rollo shows they fell way short as early as 2004. Significantly, if PJHQ was not able to grasp and communicate the significance of the Sadr rebellion for forces deployed in an overwhelmingly Shia area of operations after only four iterations of Op Telic, there was little to suggest they would be better equipped to improve their performance over time–particularly as UK forces continued their relentless 6-month rotations through Iraq as the years progressed.

Returning to the overall trends in the evidence provided by British General Officers to the Iraq Inquiry, it is interesting that only three Commanding Generals chose to use the term 'insurgency' to explain the violence in southern Iraq during their period of command. For consecutive Commanding Generals to have such divergent views of their area of operations suggests that the command and control framework adopted for Iraq was not adding value–at least in this fundamental role of understanding the environment, framing, and reframing, the problem through experience over time.

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[56]LTG Rollo, Iraq Inquiry, 4, 8.

The testimony from General Sir Richard Shirreff, one of two Commanding Generals MND (SE) in 2006 gives an insight into the divergence of views between his command in Basra and the operational echelon in PJHQ (driven by competing pressures) that had emerged by the summer of 2006:

> LTG SHIRREFF: While I think we had a -- there was a difference of opinion, and clearly I based my assessment on what I saw. I briefed what I saw, my assessment, and, as I said, my proposals for dealing with the situation. My sense was that the overriding -- the overriding theme within PJHQ within London was, as I say, accelerated transition and that the gravity of the situation was not fully appreciated.[57]

In summary, the collective UK failure to reconcile the understanding of the problem it faced with the evolving view of US forces, at least following the Golden Mosque attack in February 2006, set the conditions for a divergent operational approach in 2007 that was ever widening by March 2008. The command and control framework placed too much emphasis on direction from PJHQ in London to keep pace with changing perspectives in Baghdad and provide updated direction to UK forces in Basra. This was an unnecessarily complicated arrangement that helped create conditions whereby there were three different views, in Basra, Baghdad, and London, of the problem - an anti-occupation insurgency and intra-Shia civil war in southern Iraq - that diverged and thereby undermined a coherent operational approach within the coalition.

The impact of the coalition command and control framework was even more pronounced when the evolution of the British operational approach from 2006-08 is compared with US forces. The decision by President Bush to 'surge' in Iraq was critical to the outcome of the US campaign in Iraq. What is perhaps less well-appreciated is its basis in new ideas about the nature of the problem in Iraq that emerged due to the willingness of US commanders in Iraq to re-frame the problem. During the same period US forces under Generals Casey and Petraeus adopted a new

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[57]LTG Shirreff, Iraq Inquiry, 10.

operational approach based on a changed understanding of their operational environment. An official concept in US channels since 2008, in simple terms it means looking again at the environment, questioning original ideas and assumptions, and asking if change is necessary. [58] Their evidence to the Iraq Inquiry suggests UK commanders in Iraq and London did not re-frame their problem-hence the adherence to a transition and exit strategy in 2007 rather than a UK 'surge' in southern Iraq.

As noted earlier, PJHQ's position as the UK's operational echelon for British conventional forces in southern Iraq gave it a key role in assessing the environment and determining the operational approach for MND (SE). This role encompassed inherently tricky tasks such as re-framing the problem; the latter can be particularly difficult as it requires an internal recognition that the situation has probably changed and therefore your actions need to change too. However, the British command and control structure placed operational control with PJHQ in north London rather than in Basra. This decision thereby required senior leaders and staff over 3,000 miles away to have a sufficiently expert understanding of the changing situation in Iraq whilst simultaneously directing all other UK global operations and contingencies.

In practice, this structure meant three military positions in London were particularly important: Commander Joint Operations (CJO) in PJHQ; the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) in the MOD; the Chief of the General Staff (CGS) the head of the British Army also in the MOD. The latter had no formal power over the operational approach taken in Iraq but significant informal influence due to the army's preponderant role in the campaign. The following section analyses the testimony of five General Officers who filled those positions from 2002 to 2009. Their words,

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[58]United States Army TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5-500 *Commander's Appreciation and Campaign Design*, Version 1 (Fort Monroe, Virginia: Department of the Army Headquarters, United States Army Training and Doctrine Command, 2008).

and assessment of their own actions, provide an insight of the thought process, and priorities, which shaped and defined the British operational approach in Basra. What emerges is a fair indication that PJHQ was not capable of fulfilling the role it set itself-particularly in understanding the environment in MND (SE) and providing meaningful direction on major operational matters such as the UK force laydown and the decision to recommend to MNC-I that Maysan Province transition to Provincial Iraqi Control.

The testimony shows that the two most senior army leaders in the period, Generals Dannatt and Jackson, at least with hindsight, recognized the value in questioning the core assumptions of the Iraq campaign and were concerned that they did not do so. However, the Royal Air Force Air Chief Marshall (ACM Sir Glenn Torpy) who was CJO during the critical July 2004 to March 2006 period did not share this view. His evidence highlighted the three key problems caused by placing PJHQ as the operational echelon for UK forces in Iraq when it had to command all UK forces across the globe. First, the difficulty PJHQ had in developing real expertise in the operational environment. Second, PJHQ's inability to provide continuity and insight for the frequently changing CG MND (SE) in Basra when it was dependent for its understanding on the quality and accuracy of reports from those very forces that changed every six months. Third, the under-estimation in London of the deteriorating situation in southern Iraq and fixation with reducing force levels divorced from the context of local conditions and risk. Collectively, these deficiencies, all of which are exacerbated by the command and control structure, resulted in a command climate in which reframing the problem was simply not a priority in the campaign.

Any success for PJHQ as an operational HQ for Iraq would have been built on its ability to achieve situational awareness and understanding of the dynamics within MND (SE). By doing so it would have been able to deliver insight to successive commanders in Basra, constantly monitor progress towards the desired objectives of the campaign, and provide the UK's political

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and military strategic leaders with accurate assessments of progress, resources required and risk. ACM Torpy's testimony to the Iraq Inquiry suggests that PJHQ was not successful in this role–despite his protestations to the contrary. His description of the priorities and processes of PJHQ suggest that they were focused on calculating force level reductions without meaningful reference to the changing political and security environment in southern Iraq. In short, they were focused on the science of the conflict–monitoring UK force levels–rather than the art of war–understanding, and assessing the environment and the effectiveness of the operational approach.

From ACM Torpy's evidence there are three clear examples of this issue. First, the failure in PJHQ to understand the significance of the deteriorating situation in Maysan Province and its implication for UK forces and the wider coalition mission. Second, as early as March 2005 under-estimation of the seriousness of political violence and criminality in Basra by comparing it to the violence in Baghdad instead of the UK's desired objectives in southern Iraq. Third, the description of the MND (SE) to PJHQ staffing process that calculated the rate of UK force reductions but in isolation from as accurate an assessment as possible of the political and security situation in relation to the military objective.

The violent and unstable situation in Maysan province in 2004 was noted by then CG MG Stewart in his testimony to the Iraq Inquiry. Although UK forces were able to hold their own in heavy fighting with the Jaish Al Mahdi, the tactical situation was very serious-particularly in the main urban center Al Amarah. By August 2004, the local battalion commander contemplated withdrawing his isolated garrison in CIMIC House due to the intensity of attacks by the Shia militia. To have done so in the face of Sadrist violence would have been a substantial blow to MNF and UK credibility locally, regionally and internationally. Yet when questioned on this specific issue in the Iraq Inquiry, ACM Torpy's testimony showed he, and therefore PJHQ, did not grasp the significance of events. PJHQ lacked the context and expertise to form their own assessments so were entirely dependent on the reports from the Commanding General:

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I'd like to look at an incident that happened in Maysan province that you described as a bit of a basket case in August '04, when the UK base in Al Amarah which was called CIMIC House, was effectively under siege from 5th to 23rd August and couldn't be resupplied according to one of the people who was in it and subsequently wrote a book about it, Sergeant Dan Mills, for ten days. Sergeant Mills in his book says: "At one point the forces were told that they could abandon the base", or were given an order to that effect. Do you recall an incident and do you recall the possibility of the base being abandoned?

ACM SIR GLENN TORPY: I don't remember the specific incident. There were -- I mean, there was a period when CIMIC House was under significant threat. There's no doubt about it, but it was never raised -- it was clearly raised by the GOC that there was a problem in Maysan, never to the extent that we should be abandoning the location at all, not that I recall anyway.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: If Sergeant Mills' description is accurate, this was a pretty serious sort of incident if it had got to the point where abandonment was being considered? ACM SIR GLENN TORPY: Yes.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: We have been surprised in the papers that we have seen at the CJO level and the upward briefing from PJHQ that it doesn't feature and you don't have a recollection of it either.

ACM SIR GLENN TORPY: I don't, no, no. As I say, Maysan was a problem, Al Amarah was a problem, but manageable from a GOC perspective, otherwise he would have highlighted that he couldn't cope.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: So the decision not to report this incident further up would have been one that rested with the GOC?

ACM SIR GLENN TORPY: With the GOC, certainly.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: If we had been forced to abandon, how serious would that have been from a strategic perspective?

ACM SIR GLENN TORPY: Well it, would have been serious, because it clearly would have removed our ability (a) to know what was going on in Maysan. It would have been --prevented our ability to do any security sector reforms and training of the forces up there. We would have lost visibility of what was go going on in the areas and I think would have handed the initiative to the people perpetrating that sort of activity as well.[59]

This reliance by PJHQ on in-theatre 'expertise', which as previously noted, rotated out every six months, reached the level of CJO being unable to offer his perspective on a major campaign issue: assessing the fitness of the ISF in Maysan to assume responsibility for security from UK forces:

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[59]Air Chief Marshall Sir Glenn Torpy, Iraq Inquiry, 27-28.

SIR RODERIC LYNE: I was going to seek an assessment from you as to whether the Iraqi security force in this basket case of a province were up to the task that early, but if you don't recall the specific incident you wouldn't be able to answer that question.
ACM SIR GLENN TORPY: No, I am afraid I can't help. I am sorry.
SIR RODERIC LYNE: Does this all imply that what's happening in Al Amarah in this period is at such a granular level that it just doesn't get up on to, to mix the metaphor, the radar screen of the CJO?
ACM SIR GLENN TORPY: I think that's a very fair assessment…[60]

The exchange between ACM Torpy and the Iraqi Inquiry illuminates the inadequacy of PJHQ's understanding of the operational implications of tactical developments in MND (SE). The failure of PJHQ to understand the importance of Maysan to the developing Shia insurgency, sponsored by Iran, had serious repercussions across MNF-I. The gradual British withdrawal from Maysan effectively left the province open to Iranian-sponsored Shia militias, such as the Jaish Al Mahdi, thereby leaving the MNF-I flank unprotected as lethal aid entered southern Iraq. The diaspora of former Marsh Arabs in Basra and Baghdad included many from Maysan. [61] In conjunction with support from Iranian elements, these familial and tribal connections created a ready-made network for lethal aid transport and distribution from Maysan into Iraq. Unfortunately, PJHQ's understanding of the actual situation in Maysan resulted in their dismissal of its true importance and thereby weakened the cohesion of the coalition approach.

ACM Torpy, and PJHQ, displayed a similar detachment and shallow understanding of the situation in Basra. When questioned about the operational and political implications of a typical situation report from Basra in March 2005, Torpy was unable to grasp its importance due to his mental model that compared developments in southern Iraq to the Sunni insurgency outside the UK area:

[60]Air Chief Marshall Sir Glenn Torpy, Iraq Inquiry, 28.

[61]International Crisis Group "Iraq's Muqtada Al-Sadr: Spoiler or Stabiliser?" *International Crisis Group Middle East Report,* Number 55 (July 2006), 5.

SIR MARTIN GILBERT: We have a report here, a typical weekly report dated March 2005, which is described as a quiet week: "Over the past week there were significant explosives, weapons and ammunitions finds. Criminal activity continues to dominate road communications with hijackings and attacks against civilian convoys. One aspect of the continued violence is religiously motivated attacks by Islamists. This resulted in the death of a young Christian woman. IPS were present and looked on without doing anything. The current protests and demonstrations orchestrated by militia groups, particular the Office of Martyr Sadr is of concern." Did reports like this give you cause for concern? What were you able to somehow do about it?
ACM SIR GLENN TORPY: Well, clearly they did give us cause for concern, but I have to go back to this needs to be reviewed in the context of what was going on across Iraq…..."[62]

From London, it may have seemed fair to assess progress in southern Iraq in comparison to the rest of the country. However, it underestimated the significance of those events in the context of southern Iraq and the political goals the UK had set out to achieve. The presence of Shia Islamists transporting weapons, persecuting minorities, infiltrating or intimidating the local ISF had serious implications for the British mission–not as immediately dramatic as suicide bombings in Baghdad but just as significant in the long term. If the events of this 'typical day' in Mar 2005 continued, and they did, it meant that the legitimate institutions of the Iraqi state that British forces were committed to establishing, were a threat to the local population and infiltrated by the implacably hostile Sadrists. Criminality was also seriously disrupting the basic activities of life and potentially supporting the insurgency. Nevertheless, for PJHQ this did not trigger a re-examination of the situation, problem faced and approach taken. Instead, PJHQ was concerned with reducing UK force levels; this focus was demonstrated in the process of six monthly reviews of the size of the British force in MND (SE).

The regular force level reviews were a staff process intended to check the appropriateness of the size of the British force to meet the tasks required of it in Iraq. It is significant that this was

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[62]Air Chief Marshall Sir Glenn Torpy, Iraq Inquiry, 58.

a key activity between PJHQ and MND (SE) rather than an assessment of the insurgency, local politics, or progress in the ISF. By focusing on force levels, the attention of commanders in the UK and Iraq was deflected from examining, and re-examining, the problem they faced and therefore questioning core assumptions about the British approach. It suggests PJHQ slipped into a comfort zone of focusing on the science of war (force levels) rather than grappling with the art of war (was the operational approach working). The outcome was an expectation in the UK that force levels would be able to reduce and the overall operational approach of transition and exit continue remain unchanged. The risk of a relentless staff process feeding unrealistic political expectations in London was noted by MG Dutton, CG MND (SE) in Aug 2005 but did not seem to register as a serious concern for PJHQ:

> BARONESS USHA PRASHAR: In August 2005 Major General James Dutton wrote to you about the latest force level review, warning about the levels of uncertainty and urging considerable caution, given the political uncertainty. He concluded, and I quote: "The last thing I want to do is to appear to question my predecessor's optimistic assumptions but I feel I must inject a note of caution in recognition of the risks and uncertainties involved. We must not allow efficient staffing processes to get ahead of reality. If we do we will find ourselves having to explain apparent failure in MoD and Whitehall because we ourselves raised expectations unrealistically." How did you react to this warning?
> ACM SIR GLENN TORPY: Well, I think a perfectly reasonable statement to make by GOC and I think he would have been characterising it --this is from memory -- there was clearly in the back of his mind Afghanistan sitting out there. There was an imperative from everybody, I mean from General Casey downwards, to make transition happen as quickly as possible because it was seen as progress.[63]

This is very revealing. There is little grasp that conditions in southern Iraq are at best fragile and at worst already showing strong signs of not meeting the desired political end-state. The wary assessment of the Commanding General is placed in the context of the implied requirement for UK forces to withdraw from Iraq to reinforce in Afghanistan. Finally, it shows a commitment to an aggressive interpretation of the MNF-I operational approach of transition with little evidence

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[63]Air Chief Marshall Sir Glenn Torpy, Iraq Inquiry, 53.

of considering and anticipating alternative courses of action should that approach change or conditions in Iraq show it to be unsuitable. This lack of agility and flexibility in the British approach in Iraq, driven by the challenge of balancing Iraq with an expanded military role in Afghanistan, is illustrated by the evidence from Generals Jackson and Dannatt. The over-riding strategic imperative to transition in Iraq and reinforce in Afghanistan contributed to an unwillingness to challenge core assumptions by re-framing the problem.

Generals Jackson and Dannatt were the consecutive holders of the post Chief of the General Staff (CGS), head of the British Army, from 2003 to 2009. By the formal chain of command they were excluded from operational decisions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nevertheless their representation of the dominant Service in both theatres, and significant professional experience of counter-insurgency, made their views influential within the MOD. Both recognized, with hindsight at least, that the underlying ethos of a short, sharp expeditionary war in Iraq was not valid, should have been questioned and was found wanting by the deteriorating situation in Iraq:

> SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: So did you think this [UK expectations of early drawdown and withdrawal] was unrealistic at the time?
> GEN. SIR MIKE JACKSON: It worried me, and I think my visit reports reflect that. As the honeymoon period came to its all too-rapid end and as violence increased gradually in the late summer of 2003, yes, it was a concern that we would be too thin on the ground….I think it is fair to say certainly I didn't and I don't think anybody said, "You have got this one wrong", that the degree of violence which then ensued was forecast. So it was in a way an assumption that there would be, if not benign, it would be a tolerable security situation in Phase IV.[64]

General Dannatt was unequivocal in his assessment: they were mistaken in 2003 and a greater awareness of military history would have stimulated valuable reflection:

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[64]General Sir Mike Jackson, Iraq Inquiry, 24.

GEN. SIR RICHARD DANNATT: It was a major factor. I will take it head on. You refer to the wisdom of hindsight. Actually I think history can be quite instructive here. You said perhaps we would not have envisaged keeping troops into Iraq until 2009. Well, I think history shows that actually these things do take longer than you expect………Why did we think that Iraq was going to be -- after all regime change and putting a new regime in place was quite a tall order, why did we actually think we could do this very quickly? I think history would have indicated to the contrary, given the operations that I have just mentioned.[65]

The evolution of the British campaign in southern Iraq drew similar tough introspection from General Dannatt. He noted the divergence by 2007 of the British and US operational approaches in Iraq, but that it was based on choice not accident:

GEN. SIR RICHARD DANNATT: We were doing the opposite. We were doing the opposite by design. We were following the previous policy, which was to progressively hand over to Iraqi control. That was the policy articulated by General Casey, General Petraeus' predecessor, and because in the south through 2003/4 and to an extent in 2005 it had gone fairly well in the south….So we had this rather lumpy dynamic of us reducing as a matter of policy and the Americans increasing as a matter of policy. Perhaps the overall coalition command perhaps have called us to stop and check, but I go back to putting this in context in Afghanistan. By 2007 we had a significant force in Afghanistan fighting as fiercely in Afghanistan as 2 and 4 Rifles were fighting around Basra Palace.[66]

Within this assessment the inflexibility of the British military position is exposed and the lack of coalition coherence worsened by the command and control structure placing PJHQ in command of UK forces in MND (SE). Throughout the period 2003-2007, at least, it was clear CENTCOM had made Iraq the main effort compared to Afghanistan. Yet as early as 2004 the UK had made a policy decision based on transition and withdrawal from Iraq to enable expansion of the UK military role in Afghanistan. Implicitly, Afghanistan was more important than Iraq within this context. The effect was to constrain the resources and operational approach of MND (SE) from 2004 to 2007.

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[65]General Sir Richard Dannatt, Iraq Inquiry, 74.

[66]General Sir Richard Dannatt, Iraq Inquiry, 28.

General Dannatt went further in questioning the role of the UK military leadership in this decision making process. He noted the place in British Army planning where commanders, and their staff, are encouraged to think critically about the mission and situation to determine if what they were originally order to do still valid and feasible. This is known as a 'Q4 moment': has the situation changed and is my mission still valid? General Dannatt's view was clear–this could have been done in Iraq:

> GEN. SIR RICHARD DANNATT: ….I ask a hypothetical question: should we have revisited that decision, the one taken in 2004, to do more in Afghanistan in 2006, revisited it perhaps during the latter part of 2005/early 2006? Perhaps we should have done. I could have played a part in saying I think we should revisit it. I didn't say we should revisit it. One accepted it as a policy decision and we got on with it. Maybe that was an error…..So I am afraid it comes back to what I have been saying all along, that Afghanistan provided the context of the constraint of what we might otherwise have done in Iraq and could not do from 2004/5 onwards…
> SIR LAWRENCE FREEDMAN: ….Was that a deliberate decision taken at the highest levels of Government or was that just a consequence of a decision taken inadvertently a couple of years before?
> GEN. SIR RICHARD DANNATT: It was certainly the latter. It was certainly a consequence of the decision taken in 2004 and it begged the hypothetical question which I debated a moment or two ago as to whether in the light of the way circumstances in Iraq were deteriorating whether we should have revisited that decision. Without getting into military doctrine, we have something we call "Question 4". When you are analysing a mission, the fourth question you ask yourself is, "Has the situation changed since my superior gave me my orders? If the answer is "yes", then you revisit the whole decision-making process. Maybe we failed to do that, but I have already debated that.[67]

The evidence from Generals Dannatt, Jackson and ACM Torpy illustrate the tensions within the UK strategy as finite resources were stretched between Iraq and Afghanistan. It also highlights a mental model and core assumptions about the utility of limited, expeditionary warfare that was gradually found wanting, but not re-assessed, in Iraq. Over time this issue was compounded by adoption of an inflexible operational approach, and ever reducing force levels, that de-emphasized understanding the changing problem in Iraq. Unlike US senior leaders who re-framed

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[67]General Sir Richard Dannatt, Iraq Inquiry, 86, 90-91.

the problem after the Golden Mosque attack in March 2006, British military leaders could not perceive, or even ignored, the steady drumbeat of incidents that individually, and cumulatively, suggested all was not well in MND (SE).

There are probably many more factors that could emerge from classified documents that could increase our knowledge of PJHQ's process for understanding southern Iraq and the command climate in London that did not see 're-framing the problem', or a 'Question 4 moment' as a high priority. In comparison with the change in US approach in Mar 2006, it is striking that the Basra riots in summer 2003, the Sadrist Uprising in Maysan and Basra in summer 2004, the Jameat incident in Sept 2005, the influx of EFP IEDs from Iran and the infiltration of the ISF by Shia militias did not prompt a re-assessment of the problem and approach.

From the evidence in the public domain, it is likely PJHQ and the MOD disproportionately influenced by priorities in London at the expense of developing a better understanding of the true conditions in Iraq and re-assessing the operational approach. The challenge of managing two competing campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan clearly did not help– with prioritization, allocation of scarce resources, or clarity of thought. They may also have inadvertently misled themselves by comparing southern Iraq to the violence of Baghdad and the Sunni triangle rather than against their desired political goals. The failure to reframe the problem by asking tough questions about the changing environment in MND (SE) resulted in an overly scientific approach driven by disproportionate attention to monitoring and reducing force levels. The hidden cost for PJHQ was MND (SE)'s ability to develop a better sense of the political, economic and security outcomes British forces were achieving and what that meant for meeting the campaign objectives. Regarding Iraq, PJHQ had crystal clear sight of some of the trees but a very poor view of the whole forest.

CONCLUSION

The evidence provided by the cohort of British General Officers at the Iraq Inquiry demonstrated the range of opinion on success and failure of the British campaign in Iraq. Many factors beyond the military domain were identified: the difficulties of achieving a whole of government approach; scarcity of military resources; the challenge of fighting a war in Iraq and Afghanistan; and, the perennial challenge of achieving unity in coalition war. It is revealing where there was no consensus: not on the nature of the conflict and the 'problem' that UK forces faced or on how to best adapt the operational approach as conditions changed over time. However, all factors were underpinned by a general dissatisfaction with the British command and control structure that created a de facto UK campaign and frustrated a coherent operational approach within the coalition (see figures 1.5 and 1.6). Given the dissatisfaction articulated by a generation of senior British officers, it suggests a robust internal examination of the UK's military performance is necessary and would produce valuable insights for the future.

From the evidence provided to the Iraq Inquiry, there are five lessons that should be considered in future British and American coalitions: first, from the outset create a Combined Joint Task Force with a genuinely integrated command and control structure rather than selecting 'parallel' or 'lead' nation; second, build a common operational approach based on the expectation that re-framing the problem based on subsequent experience will be necessary and essential; third, create an ethos of intellectual honesty, humility and 'thick skin' to create a culture that supports difficult tasks such as re-framing the problem; fourth, ensure clear boundaries between the coalition operational chain of command in-theatre and those of the supporting nations within the coalition; fifth, agree and enforce common, or at least similar, tour lengths across the coalition to help develop expertise through continuity of personnel.

As indicated by the comments from British Commanding Generals examined in previous sections, it is genuinely difficult to effectively address command and control structures within a

coalition. Tension is always likely to exist when determining the ideal balance between preserving national autonomy yet gaining the benefits of integrating capabilities from across the coalition. This is not a new problem. In 1944, American and British senior leaders grappled with finding the optimal composition and structure for Allied command and control for the invasion of occupied France and beyond. This issue was so serious that it merited an entire chapter of its own in the official US Army history of the European campaign.[68] Of note, the Allies struck a balance between nationally-based Army Groups that minimized internal friction in culture, supply, tactics and ethos while combining US, UK and Canadian officers at the operational echelon to increase understanding and teamwork. Hence, General Eisenhower's deputy was British RAF officer Air Marshall Tedder and their team of US and UK officers were specifically selected for their ability to work in a robust, integrated coalition staff.[69] This balance provides an insight into the sort of model that may prove to be best practice for other campaigns – including complex counter-insurgency conflicts similar to Iraq.

Given how genuinely difficult the issue of command and control within coalition warfare is in practice, is there any point to trying to find a better formula than was arrived at by UK forces in Iraq? Examination of the testimony provided to the Iraq Inquiry suggests that while nothing can guarantee success, some methods are more suitable than others. The evidence from British General Officers to the Iraq Inquiry demonstrated the concern that the de facto 'parallel' command and control structure did not generate an effective and coherent operational approach.

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[68]Forrest C. Pogue. *The Supreme Command: the European Theater of Operations* (Washington: DC; Office of the Chief of Military History, the Department of the Army, 1954).

[69]Pogue. *The Supreme Command*. 54, 56.

It is telling that the final two CGs of MND (SE) expressed no reservations about the command and control structure as they explicitly interpreted their role as subordinate to the US CG of MNF-I rather than to PJHQ in London (see figures 1.5 and 1.6). Critically, this change reflected a shift in thinking in Basra and Baghdad. The final two Commanding Generals saw their operational headquarters as MNC-I rather than PJHQ and synchronized their effort accordingly.[70] In Baghdad, the attitude to MND (SE) shifted too. Rather than leave the south to the Brits to 'keep quiet', increased attention from MNF-I and MNC-I resulted in a better integrated and more effective campaign in Basra. What is clear is that the structure that placed UK forces primarily under PJHQ's operational command did not provide a framework that increased the ability of British forces in southern Iraq to better understand, and adapt to, their environment. The combination of 6 month tours for tactical forces with oversight by an organization also committed to running all UK global operations created a negative cycle where less and less expertise was passed on as time progressed. The negative impact on learning and adaption is examined in more detail below and is illustrated in figure 1.10.

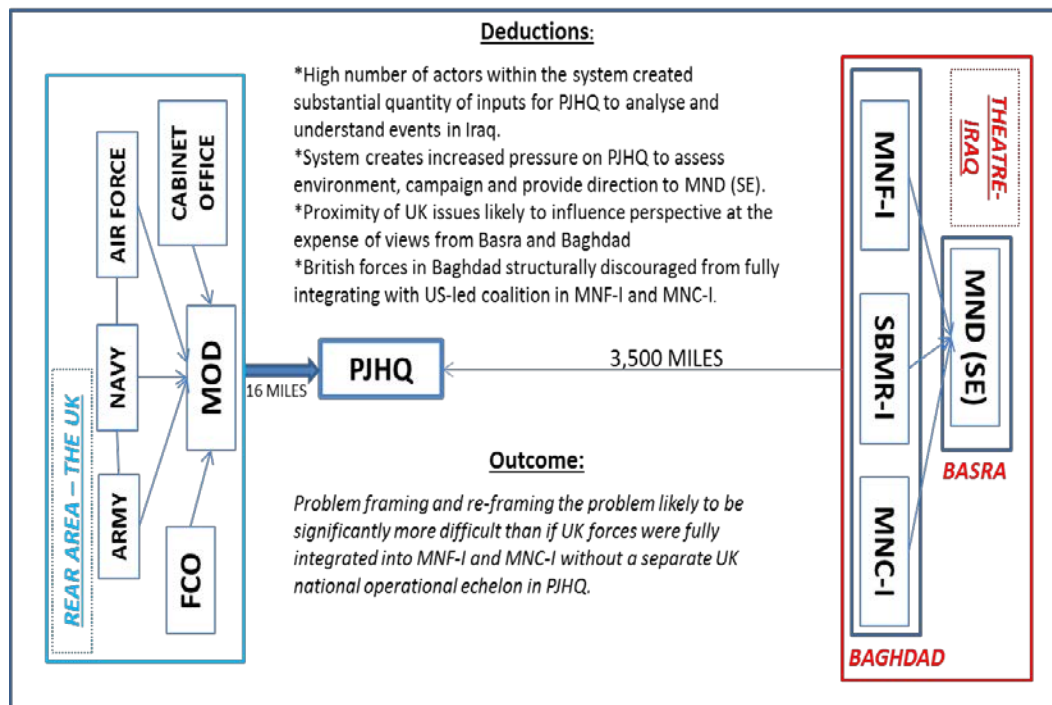[70]LTG White-Spunner, Iraq Inquiry, 30. MG Salmon, Iraq Inquiry, 3.

Figure 1.10 Problem-Framing Comparison: impact of UK C2 model on ability to develop better understanding of the environment and to re-frame the problem.

Source: Author's own diagram.

The UK experience in southern Iraq suggests that any future coalition trying to achieve unity of effort in counter-insurgency or stabilization operations then an 'integrated' structure is the most appropriate choice. The devil is in the detail: there must be no separate national operational echelons hidden away to degrade coalition unity as occurred internally within MND (SE) with mini-national areas and externally to MNF-I in Baghdad (see figure 1.10). Achieving the optimum command and control structure for stabilization operations may require a change from the command and control model used for the initial offensive operations intended to defeat an adversary's conventional military forces. The experience of UK forces almost accidentally becoming the dominant force in MND (SE) and the unintended consequence of southern Iraq becoming a quasi-independent 'Brit area' suggests that it is worth anticipating this kind of challenge even though changes in command and control structure can be time-consuming and

disruptive in the short term. An alternative concept for developing a better command and control

framework for Iraq (and for future US-UK coalitions) is outlined in figure 1.11.
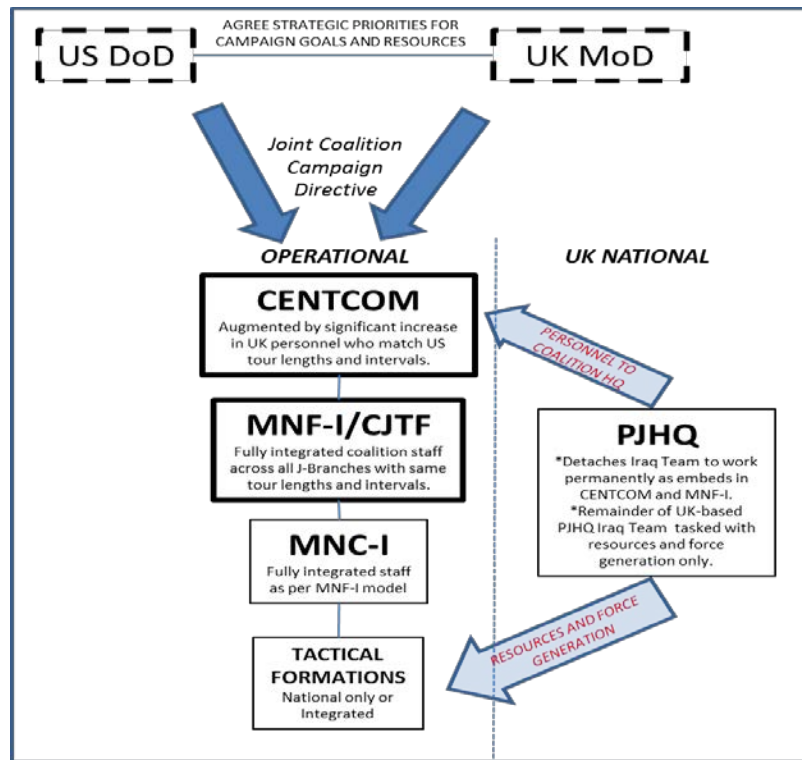

Figure 1.11 Suggested integrated coalition C2 framework for Iraq (and for future coalitions).
Source: Author's own diagram.

Regardless of the specifics of command and control structures chosen in the future, there

is every reason to anticipate this as one of the earliest challenges when planning the campaign. To

that end, having robust conversations to enable clear choices to be made about the overall

command and control structures for fighting the war should be made at its inception–even if that

requires managing the expectations of national political leaders in advance. Better that painful

political discussion take place than a coalition command and control framework be established

that inadvertently creates de facto national areas, such as MND (SE) in 2003, and frustrates

synergy and unity in the coalition.

Expectations about 'being right', and the necessity of questioning core assumptions once war begins, must change within future coalitions and the military profession in general. The difficulty in accurately predicting the character of the next war is one of the few areas of consensus within the military profession. It is arguably a constant across centuries as every generation of politicians and soldiers grapple with what force can achieve and how best to use it. The acceleration of technological development from the twentieth century onwards may not have made the world inherently more complex but it has certainly not made it any easier for the military to determine how best to train, equip and employ force in all possible future circumstances. There are no shortages of examples from history of very capable men expecting to fight one war and having to adapt to the reality of something else entirely.

Given this historical context, and the insights available from systems analysis, it is hard to see why our collective expectations are not already built around automatically expecting to re-frame the problem once war begins. No matter the confidence within any coalition of ultimate success, once the fighting starts it would be unwise to expect to encounter anything other than an ill-structured, unfamiliar problem requiring adaptation and agility. To that end, UK and US military culture must catch up with new doctrine on design and mission command to explicitly encourage every commander to build an operational approach that anticipates re-framing the problem as the conflict unfolds and a command and control structure that enables, rather than discourages, this process.

It is highly unlikely that the core assumptions and assessments that underpin any operational approach and campaign will be challenged if a culture of intellectual honesty, thick skin, humility and trust does not exist. Without the presence of those three factors, any attempt to re-frame the problem could be viewed as a sign of personal, professional, and national failure, and even lack of loyalty or commitment to the cause. In Iraq it is significant that US forces found the intellectual space to question their core assumptions and were willing to re-frame the problem

albeit when very strong evidence–the Golden Mosque attack in Mar 2006–suggested they were on the wrong path. In contrast an example of British forces radically re-framing their understanding of the problem they faced in MND (SE) is noticeable by its absence. The unwillingness to address the political challenge from the Sadrists and dismissal of tangible evidence of their dark, violent influence (in some cases control) of the ISF suggest a fundamental structural problem in UK forces ability to make sound assumptions, calculate and monitor risk, and provide clear, forthright military assessments. The disparate range of views on the nature of the conflict they faced amongst all thirteen Commanding Generals of MND (SE) indicates this was a systemic problem and not an isolated issue.

National support must not interfere with the priorities and operational approach determined by the coalition but not become detached from the conflict. Achieving a clear, unified, synchronized level of support that can keep pace with the evolving operational approach is the critical tasks. Although this is always likely to be difficult in practice, agreement at the highest level can reduce friction and the risk of divergence. For example, in the period 2004-2008 the UK and US should have decided that Iraq was a higher priority for success than Afghanistan and therefore for allocated resources accordingly. They did not; the outcome was a divergent approach in Iraq at a critical period in 2008. To that end, a stronger ethos of teamwork is necessary than was shown in Iraq. Junior coalition partners should not by stealth, or design, try and develop their own 'campaign plans' that interfere with the coalition approach. There should be one operational commander, with one campaign plan, who is empowered to lead and win the war. In this context, national support should focus on force generation and resources; under no circumstances must a national headquarters intrude or emerge as an operational echelon in its own right. There would also be less risk of the latter developing if junior partners volunteer for, and are included in, key posts in the highest operational command structures for the coalition.

Developing expertise is highly likely to be a difficult process in war–particularly as operations transition from phase to phase with each one emphasizing different skills. This is not a new problem; continuity of personnel and institutions is a key theme in many previous conflicts-its absence was noted by many contributors to the Iraq Inquiry. It may be painful to achieve, and arduous to do, but for future conflicts it would be a force multiplier if common tour lengths of 1-2 years were agreed in advance within the coalition. Morale may not be improved by a lengthy deployment to what is frequently an unpleasant, dangerous environment. It is worth noting how the failure to boldly tackle this issue built a central flaw into the UK campaign in Iraq. Under the parallel command and control structure, PJHQ was required to provide continuity of knowledge to support the new Commanding General MND (SE) yet PJHQ itself was highly dependent on the reporting and perspective from that new commander and his staff. Unfortunately, the latter only ever had, at best, around six to nine months experience. This created a feedback loop of mutual ignorance rather than ever increasing knowledge and understanding (see figure 1.12 below).
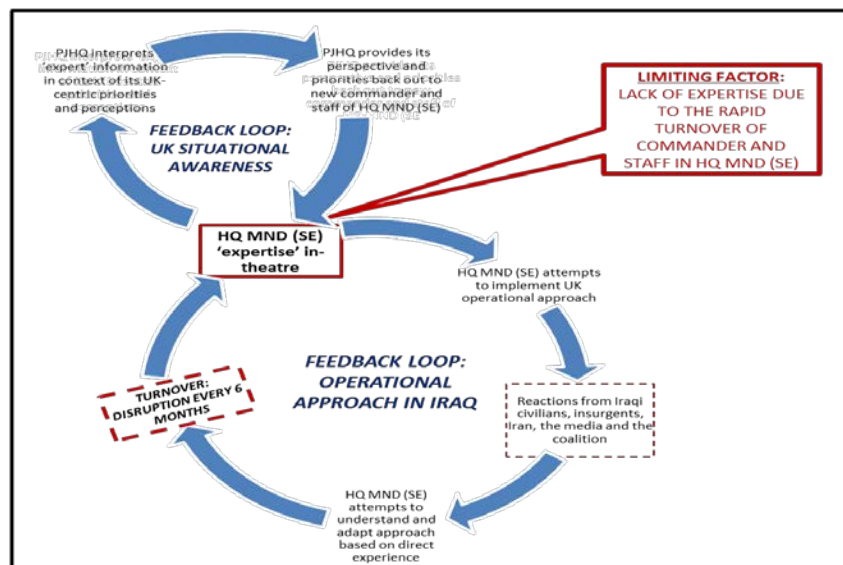

Figure 1.12. The impact of UK short tour lengths and a UK-based operational command and control structure on learning and adaptation: a systems approach

If the risk of poor situational understanding, lack of continuity, and an incoherent operational approach are to be mitigated, or better still overcome, then bold measures are necessary–even at the price of short term pain. From a long-term perspective, morale in an all-volunteer military is probably more adversely affected by prolonged exposure to a stuttering, ineffective conflict than one or two longer exposures to a more effective campaign. In short, as a military we will all suffer more from regular exposure to a bad campaign that ends in failure than limited but longer, deeper involvement in a campaign that stands a higher chance of success.

Finally, any US-UK coalition should consider how best to integrate senior staff into the in-theatre operational echelon and also how to synchronize the efforts of the appropriate Combatant Command and PJHQ. In future coalition campaigns the UK, and other junior partners, should consider deploying senior figures from their national operational headquarters (for example, Deputy Commander Joint Operations, DCJO, in PJHQ) to the Combined Joint Task Force in theatre that is responsible for the campaign. It may even be appropriate to deploy a small team from PJHQ, led by a General Officer, into theatre to permanent posts in the Combined Joint Task Force. This 'PJHQ Forward' could provide the Deputy Commander of the Combined Joint Task Force and integrate UK staff into the intelligence, operations, plans and logistics branches. They would provide a UK view while directly supporting the coalition campaign and giving the MOD better situational awareness. This structure reduces risk of divergent approaches developing and some of the pressure on the Division commander so the latter can fulfill a tactical role within the coalition.

Problem-framing and the command and control structures in the most recent Iraq war are just two issues that can be explored to better understand operational art in modern war. A deeper exploration of the British operational approach–particularly decision-making and situational

awareness–would yield wider insights for coalition warfare. Looking beyond the 'dry' topic of command states and command and control structures, the British experience suggests that flexibility and adaptation cannot be taken for granted–no matter the strength of the track record of the institution. By inculcating an ethos of intellectual honesty, willingness to question the wisdom of your own approach and to learn the military is investing in its future as much as it is by retaining expensive weapon platforms and procurement programs.

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