



To what degree did British presence in Iraq during Operation Telic foster the conditions for the growth of the so-called Islamic State?

Jordan Edwards

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University of Wales Trinity Saint David

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Abstract

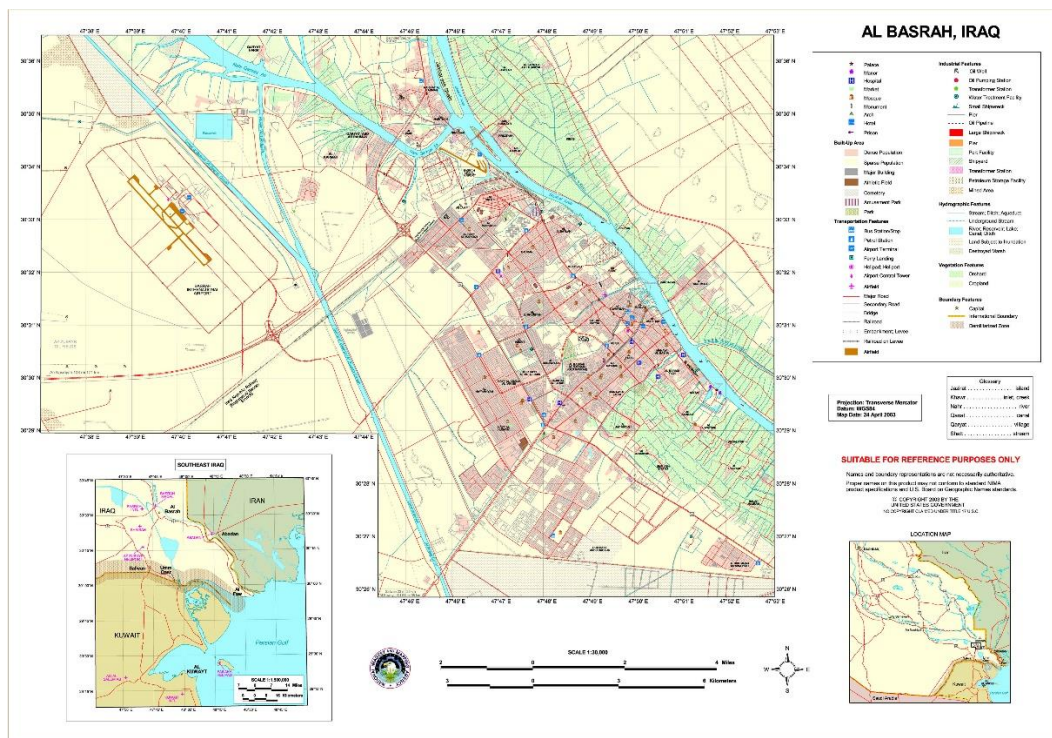
This dissertation will seek to draw connections between British intervention in Iraq during Operation Telic and the subsequent growth of the so-called Islamic State. In doing so, an assessment as to the degree of culpability held by British forces in setting the conditions for the growth of the terror network will be made. This assessment will draw credibility from detailed analysis of issues encountered by British forces during Operation Telic, both in the political sphere and during military intervention. Analysis of the British campaign will be followed by an investigation into the development of the so-called Islamic State. By tracing the evolutions experienced by the organisation, connections will be highlighted regarding British influence. Ultimately, the degree in which British presence in Iraq fostered the conditions for the growth of the so-called Islamic State will be assessed.

I would like to thank my family for their enduring support throughout my studies, without whom this dissertation would not have been possible.

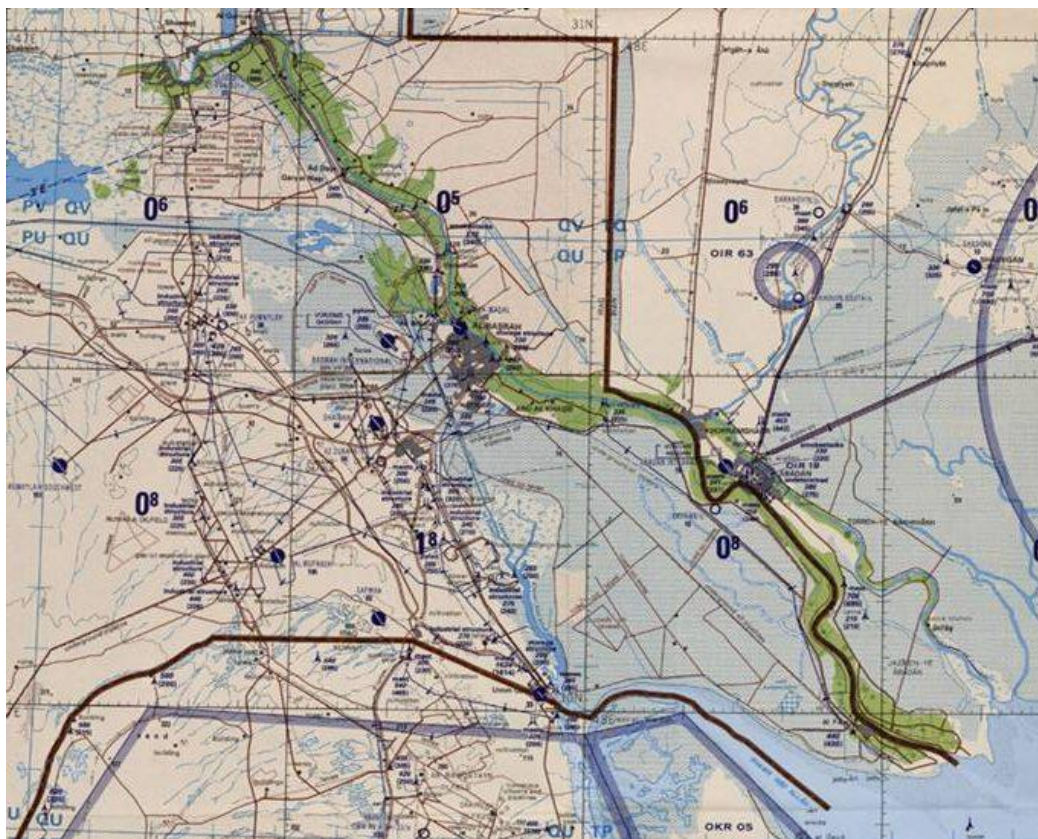
Abbreviations

- Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI)
- Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS)
- Battlegroup (BG)
- Central Command (CENTCOM)
- Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)
- Chief of Defence Staff (CDS)
- Chief of General Staff (CGS)
- Commanding Officer (CO)
- Captured Persons (CPERS)
- Female Engagement Team (FET)
- Forward Operation Base (FOB)
- General Officer Commanding (GOC)
- High Value Target (HVT)
- Information Technology (IT)
- Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition and Reconnaissance (ISTAR)
- Iraqi Army (IA)
- Iraqi Police Service (IPS)
- Islamic State (IS)
- Islamic State in Iraq (ISI)
- Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)
- Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)
- Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC)
- North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)
- Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA)
- Officer Commanding (OC)
- Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)
- Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)
- Pre-Deployment Training (PDT)
- Reception, Staging and Onward Integration (RSOI)
- Relief in Place (RIP)
- Royal Air Force (RAF)
- Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers (REME)
- Royal Engineers (RE)
- Royal Military Police (RMP)
- Royal Navy (RN)
- Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (RRF)
- Special Air Service (SAS)
- Special Boat Service (SBS)
- Special Forces (SF)
- The Light Infantry (LI)
- United Nations (UN)
- United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR)
- United States Marine Corps (USMC)
- 3 Commando Brigade (3CB)
- 6 Battalion the Rifles (6 RIFLES)
- 16 Air Assault Brigade (16AA)

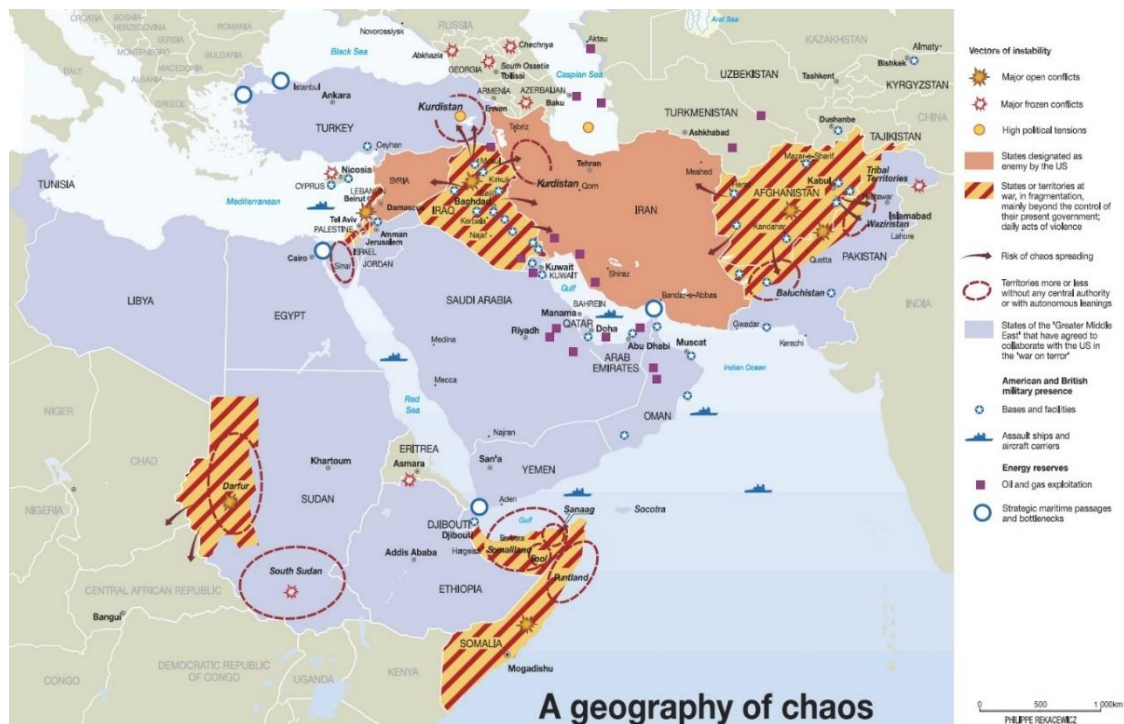
List of Maps



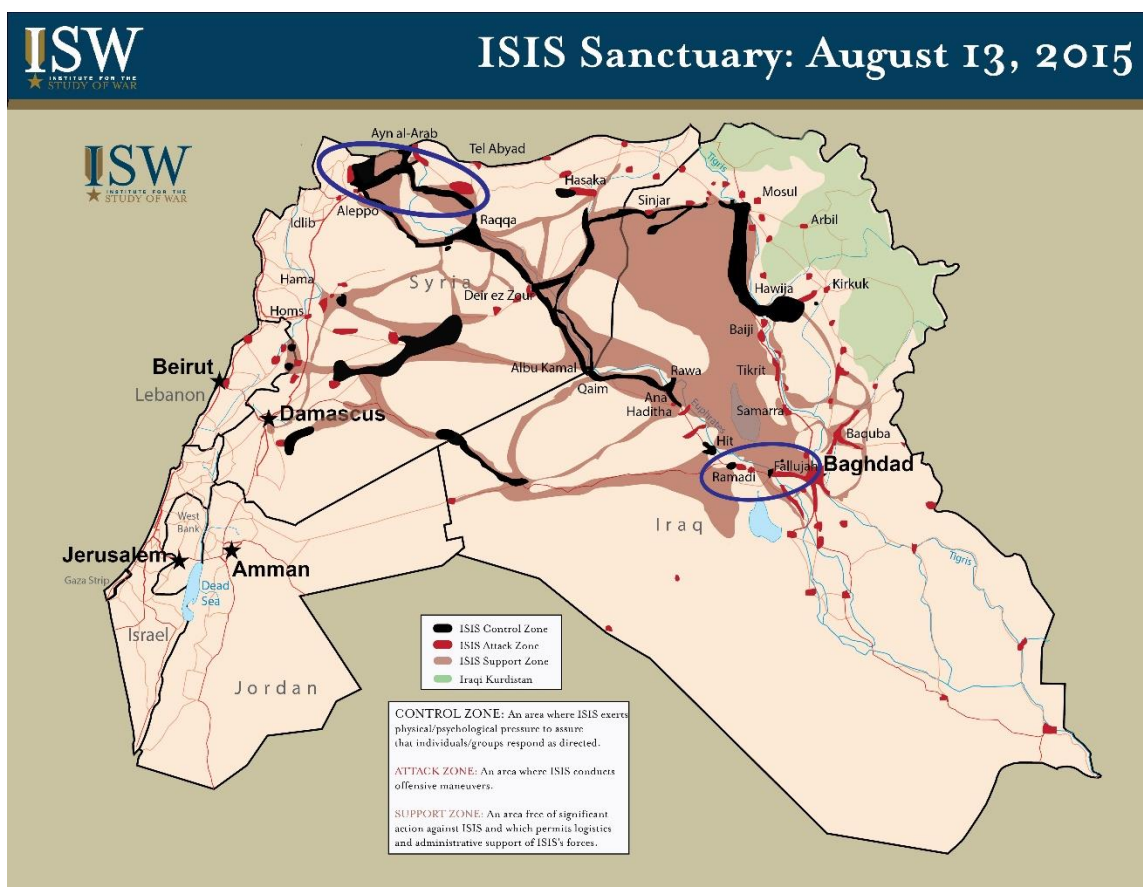
T. Ripley, 'Basra Street Map 2003', Operation Telic (2003) [online]. Available at <http://operationtelic.co.uk/?p=154>. (Accessed 20/04/18).



T. Ripley, 'Kuwait and Southern Iraq', Operation Telic (2003) [online]. Available at <http://operationtelic.co.uk/?p=160>. (Accessed 20/04/18).



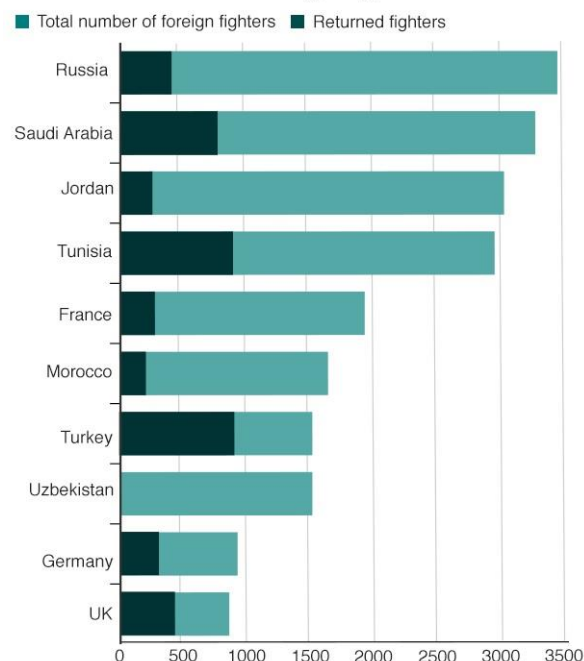
P. Rekacewicz, 'Geography of Chaos', *Le Monde diplomatique* (2007) [online]. Available at <https://mondediplo.com/maps/geographyofchaos>. (Accessed 15/01/18).



K. Kagan, 'ISIS Sanctuary: August 13, 2015', Institute for the Study of War (2015) [online]. Available at <http://www.understandingwar.org/map/isis-sanctuary-august-13-2015>. (Accessed 30/04/18).

List of Tables

Nationalities of IS foreign fighters



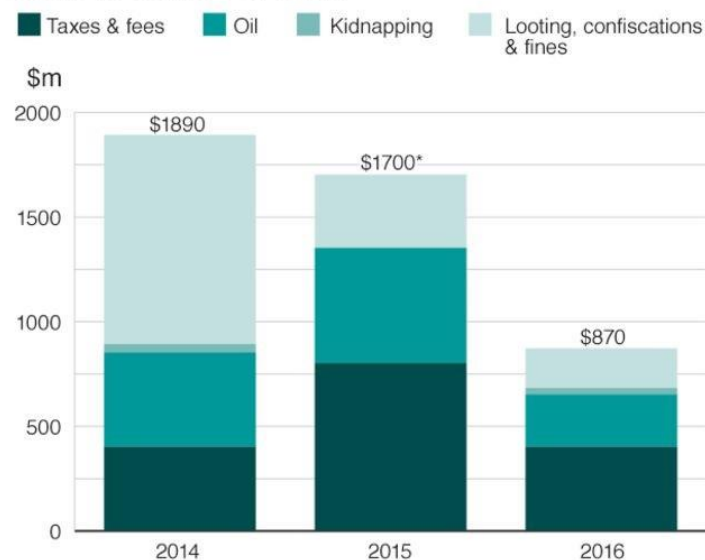
*Most numbers are approximate and are dated between Mar 2016 and Aug 2017. In the case of Uzbekistan there is no data for returned fighters.

Source: The Soufan Group (Oct 2017)

BBC

The Soufan Group, 'Nationalities of IS foreign fighters', BBC (2017) [online]. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27838034>. (Accessed 30/04/18).

Islamic State revenue



*2015 kidnapping figure is unknown

Note: Amounts shown are upper estimates. Other income comes from the sale of antiquities and foreign donations, but is not thought to be significant.

Source: ICSR

BBC

The International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence, 'Islamic State revenue', BBC (2017) [online]. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27838034>. (Accessed 30/04/18).

Introduction

British contribution towards the invasion and subsequent occupation of Iraq in 2003 remains a contentious issue, and with the recent publication of Lord Chilcot's heavily anticipated 'Iraq Inquiry' has once again been brought into conversation¹. Due to the divisive nature of the subject, there currently exists a lack of engagement in scholarship with events, and as such the lessons learnt during the conflict are in danger of being lost. This dissertation will seek to address the above issue. Additionally, connections will be drawn between British involvement in Iraq and the subsequent expansion of the so-called Islamic State. Until now, the subjects of British involvement in the conflict and that of radical Islamic militancy have remained distinct. Establishing whether British presence in Iraq set the conditions for the expansion of the once isolated terrorist network is an endeavour which lends considerable originality to this dissertation.

Operation Telic encapsulates all British combat operations conducted in Iraq between the March of 2003 and April 2009. This includes the initial invasion in support of the US Operation Iraqi Freedom, opposing the uniformed Iraqi Army in order to depose the brutal dictator Saddam Hussein. However, following this comparably short period of conventional warfare, the vast majority of the six years encapsulated by Operation Telic would involve the application of Phase IV operations². This term will be referenced repeatedly in the following work and refers to the application of security and stabilisation operations. Decisions made, and action taken, during this phase had a significant impact on the future of Iraq. These events will be analysed in order to establish a connection to the development of the so-called Islamic State.

An important note in reference to the terminology that will be consistent when referring to the terrorist network is that the precursor of 'so-called' will always be applied. In absence of this, legitimacy would be lent to an organisation built upon the foundations of terror, oppression and manipulation. The terror network has experienced many transitions and has taken upon various titles, both the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) as well as the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) would have been appropriate³. However, referring to the organisation as the so-called Islamic State is both the most accurate and workable option. Tracing the origins of the so-called Islamic State will be crucial in allowing causation to be established between British actions and the organisations expansion.

¹ J. Chilcot, 'The Iraq Inquiry', National Archives (2016) [online]. Available at <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20171123123237/http://www.iraqinquiry.org.uk/>.

² T. Ripley, *Operation Telic: The British Campaign in Iraq 2003-2009* (Lancaster: Telic-Herrick Publications, 2016). p. 154.

³ E. Sky, *The Unravelling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq* (London: Atlantic Books, 2016). p. 355.

This dissertation does hold a personal element contributing further significance to the importance of understanding the actions of contemporaries during Operation Telic. This is due to the potential of personally deploying to Iraq in support of the current Operation Shader⁴. From my perspective as an infantry soldier in the Army Reserve, and as a Rifleman serving in 6 Battalion the Rifles (6 RIFLES), learning from mistakes of the past is essential if stability is to be achieved in Iraq. Conducting this research project has been extremely beneficial in providing far greater depth of understanding regarding both Operation Telic and the development of the so-called Islamic State.

⁴ British Army, 'Operation: Iraq', Ministry of Defence (2018) [online]. Available at <https://www.army.mod.uk/deployments/iraq/>.

Chapter One – Aims and Methodology

Aims

This dissertation will seek to achieve five distinct objectives, designed as a conduit into addressing the overarching question. Initially, an investigation will be conducted into the British Governments foreign policy of military intervention in Iraq. This objective will be achieved through placing focus on the events leading to, and encapsulated by, Operation Telic I. Secondly, the subsequent consequences of such military intervention will be brought into question. Decisions made by both politicians and senior military commanders would greatly influence the future stability of Iraq. Each of the above objectives will be delivered during the second and third chapters.

Next, an assessment of British culpability in the rise of radical Islamic extremism, growing out of a deteriorating western sentiment, will be conducted. Identifying if, and where, failings were made by the British military during Operation Telic will be key in addressing the question of focus. Primarily, this objective will investigate the development of the so-called Islamic State, tracing the organisations rise in prominence. This objective will be engaged with throughout the dissertation; however, will form the bedrock of chapter four titled 'The Rise of the so-called Islamic State'.

One major condition attributed to the rise of the so-called Islamic State, is the power vacuum created following the defeat of Saddam Hussein's dictatorship. Examining whether this power vacuum could have been filled by coalition forces is the intention behind objective four. This examination will also be conducted during chapter four. Finally, having assessed the degree in which Operation Telic fostered the conditions for the growth of the so-called Islamic State, recommendations will be provided on how to improve any future expeditionary operation. In doing so, the lessons learnt during Operation Telic will be safeguarded. The pursuit of achieving the five objectives outlined here will ensure a coherent approach in addressing the question of focus.

Historiography

The greatest challenge experienced whilst conducting this project has been the limited quantity of relevant scholarship to drawn upon. Primarily, this is as a result of the extremely modern period encapsulated by Operation Telic, running from 2003 up until 2009. In contrast to a research project focusing on the events of the second world war, of which considerable exploration has been conducted in scholarship, there has simply not been enough time elapsed to adequately address Operation Telic. Additionally, due to the contentious nature of British involvement in combat operations, following the fall of the Ba'ath party regime lead by Saddam Hussein, there has been a desire to forget the events which unfolded in Iraq. It is also important to consider the rapid

transition conducted between the operation in Iraq and a shift in focus to Afghanistan. Drawn from the limited pool of scholarship regarding the events in Iraq, Tim Ripley provides an interesting perspective on this phenomenon.

‘Much of the trauma caused by the Iraq experience was never fully explored or faced immediately after the withdrawal from Iraq because of the immediate escalating of the British role in Afghanistan meant that there was little time to dwell on Operation Telic.’⁵

All these factors contribute to the lack of engagement in scholarship with the events which unfolded in Iraq between 2003 and 2009. Of the content which can be drawn upon, Ripley undoubtedly provides the most extensive account of the British role in Iraq. Having experienced the conflict first hand in his capacity as a war correspondent, Ripley provides a unique insight into events⁶. Crucially, he focuses on Operation Telic and the British role itself. This is a niched area within existing scholarship as the majority of content exploring the conflict comes from a US perspective.

Historiography concerning radical Islamic extremism encompasses the second element of this research project. As a result of the wider nature of this subject there has been considerably greater engagement in scholarship. Fundamentalist Islamic extremism has been on the rise in recent decades and therefore at times encompasses events detached from Iraq. In relation to the set objectives for this dissertation, focus will be fixed on the development of the so-called Islamic State. As such, Jason Burke provides the most appropriate material in his book titled ‘The New Threat from Islamic Militancy’⁷. Here, he investigates the development of the terrorist network known to western intelligence agencies as Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), to the organisation which declared itself the new Islamic Caliphate. The work of Burke is crucial in drawing connection between the events of Operation Telic and the subsequent development of the so-called Islamic State.

Methodology

The final dissertation title featured here has experienced significant development from the early research objectives which had been set. Initially, the dissertation was titled ‘To what degree has western military presence in the Middle East contributed towards the rise of radical Islamic extremism’. Upon research, and consultation with the dissertation supervisor, it became apparent that this initial title required adaptation. Specifically, significant narrowing in focus was required in order to allow for the depth of engagement to be sufficient. The title upon conception would have required investigation into conflicts across the Middle East, including Iraq, Afghanistan and

⁵ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 396.

⁶ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 10-11.

⁷ J. Burke, *The New Threat from Islamic Militancy* (London: Vintage, 2016).

Palestine⁸. Additionally, the title did not limit analysis to the British role in events. Without this crucial limitation, it would have been remiss to ignore the actions of coalition partners. This would have required investigation into the decision of the US to launch Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) without the appropriate United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR); NATO support for the Israeli Government in the Palestine debate; British combat operations in Afghanistan under Operation Herrick; and finally when tracing the origins of radical Islamic extremism, the role of the British and US in instigated the Iranian coup of 1953 which resulted in the revolution of 1979. Clearly, it would have been irrational to believe that all these events could have been covered within the set word count limitation. Focusing solely on British actions during Operation Telic and the subsequent impact these actions had on the development of the so-called Islamic State was a far more realistic proposition.

The dissertations revised format offers significant originality integrating well into existing scholarship. To this point, a connection has not yet been drawn between the actions taken during Operation Telic and the development of the so-called Islamic State. In order to substantiate the existence of such a connection analysis will rely heavily on scholarship originating from individual's contemporary to Operation Telic, here particular emphasis will be placed on those witnessing the events as they developed on the ground, such as Ripley. Additionally, leading works on the spread of radical Islamic extremism will be utilised in order to both establish the catalyst for the development of the once isolated terrorist network known as Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI), and subsequent expansion into an organisation with the tenacity and supposed credibility to declare itself an Islamic Caliphate. The works of both Jason Burke and David Kilcullen will be vital in this endeavour⁹¹⁰. Through the utilisation of existing scholarship, credibility will be leant to established connections.

Finally, once investigation has been conducted into both Operation Telic and fundamentalist Islamic extremism recommendations will be provided. These recommendations will be delivered in the format of outlining any mistakes made during Operation Telic, be that militarily or politically, as well as any missed opportunities in combating the expansion of Al Qaeda in Iraq (AQI). Evidently, outlining recommendations with the benefit of hindsight can have no effect on past events. However, the process of learning from mistakes is vital in ensuring that they are not repeated by future generations.

⁸ P. Rekacewicz, 'Geography of Chaos', *Le Monde diplomatique* (2007) [online]. Available at <https://mondediplo.com/maps/geographyofchaos>.

⁹ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*.

¹⁰ D. Kilcullen, *Blood Year: Islamic State and the Failures of the War on Terror* (London: Hurst & Company, 2016).

Chapter Two – The Political Sphere

Introduction

In order to trace the origins of the so-called Islamic State, and form an assessment of British culpability, the conditions leading to the organisations evolution must first be evaluated. Such an evaluation encompasses the events of Operation Telic I, running from the invasion of Iraq in March 2003 up until unit rotations in June 2003¹¹. With the exception of Telic I, following iterations of the campaign would adhere to the standard British six-month deployment schedule. Such a cycle is referred to as a roulement, with the final iteration being Operation Telic XIII concluding in April 2009¹². Decisions made by military commanders, senior civil servants and government officials during Operation Telic I would lay the foundations for how the campaign would play out over the following six years. This chapter will highlight five contentious issues regarding the political sphere, encountered during Operation Telic I. Each issue will be evaluated in order to gauge British culpability, as well as trace any enduring effect that the decisions made would have on the future instability of Iraq. Paramount of these factors is the short-term approach to issues due to political emphasis on rapid withdrawal. As a result of this issue manifesting itself in British decision making throughout the campaign, it will be the focus of initial analysis.

Short Term Approach

During Ripley's overview of the Operation Telic campaign, he reaches the conclusion that 'many of the Army's problems were self-inflicted'¹³. In support of this assessment, the short-term approach utilised by military commanders can be identified as the bedrock of the issue. The most evident appearance of this phenomena is through self-inflicted manpower shortages during Operation Telic I. Following the successful invasion and shift into Phase IV operations, commanders intended to withdraw 'all of 1 (UK) Division's brigades and units out of Iraq by the end of June'¹⁴. Such a decision, made so early into stabilisation operations left commanders with very little flexibility, forcing manpower to be stretched thin across a large area of operations. The ability of neighbouring units to provide mutual support was dramatically degraded.

As previously indicated, during expeditionary operations the British Army operates on a six-month unit roulement. Such a layout was also present throughout the Operation Herrick campaign in Afghanistan. In comparison with the US deployment schedule, extending to iterations of twelve

¹¹ J. Bailey, R. Iron & H. Strachan, *British Generals in Blair's Wars* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013). p.69.

¹² Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 394.

¹³ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 399.

¹⁴ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 154.

months at a time, the British approach understandably attracted criticism. Ripley evaluates the British deployment schedule as a critical issue, with the 'six-month tour policy creating a mentality of short-termism'¹⁵. Establishing the most effective roulement for the British Army continues to be an active issue. A balance between the demands of the mission, the soldiers, and the Army as a whole must be taken into consideration. Clearly, an American style twelve-month deployment would greatly benefit the mission, allowing battlegroups to build a working relationship with their Iraqi piers as well as an intimate understanding of their area of operations. However, the desire of soldiers across all levels of the chain of command for an extended tour would have been minimal, separation from family and loved ones leads very quickly to diminished morale. Additionally, for the Army as a whole to function effectively there is a requirement for soldiers to attend promotion courses. This is in order to ensure leadership positions are filled, such an opportunity is not present whilst deployed on operations. The issue of the six-month roulement is evidently more complex than upon initial observation.

An additional symptom of the short-term approach was a 'strategic lack of direction' from senior commanders¹⁶. In Ripley's analysis, this was a by-product of 'military planners trying to discern the political intent of the government and then translate it into action'¹⁷. Therefore, this lack of direction to commanders on the ground was originating from indecisiveness at the highest levels of government. Subsequently, an over utilisation of the Army's principle of mission command became prevalent during Operation Telic I. Mission command, when applied as intended, is a crucial element of military doctrine and is key to battle procedure. The principle allows for decentralised decision making, resulting in anticipation at all levels of the chain of command. Likely instruction can be prepared for, as well as decisions made by junior commanders. However, mission command is only effective when all units are working towards an established unifying purpose. Without this clear purpose, action may be taken which later becomes detrimental to a higher-level mission. During the initial invasion of Iraq Major General Robin Brims, general officer commanding 1 (UK) Division, stated that he had 'almost total freedom to direct the fight for Basra in March and April 2003'¹⁸. With a clear disconnect present between the divisional commander in Iraq and military chiefs in Whitehall, action may have been taken during the occupation of Basra which were not coherent with wider British foreign policy. Such an issue only became further perplexed following the introduction of Phase IV stabilisation operations on the 22nd April 2003.

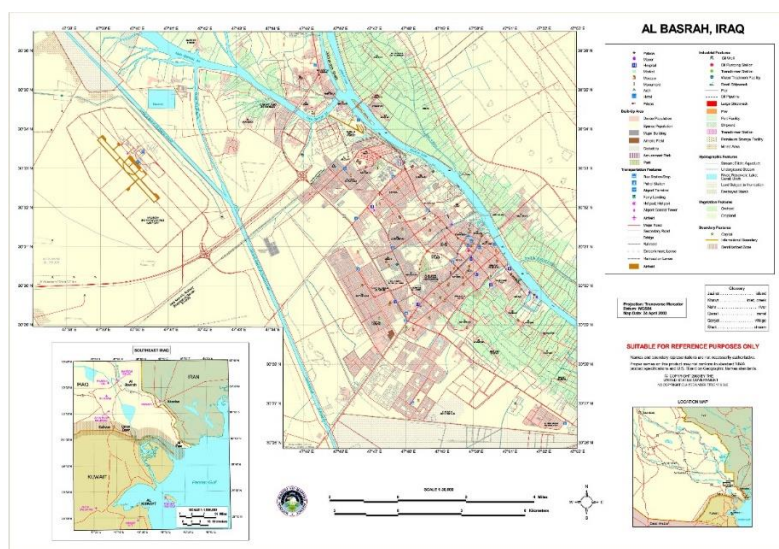
¹⁵ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 21.

¹⁶ Bailey, Iron & Strachan, *Blair's Wars*, p.79.

¹⁷ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 38.

¹⁸ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 25.

The final element of the British short-term approach which resulted in self-inflicted issues was an over reliance on eventual US intervention. Following a meeting of Brims' divisional command group on the 8th April 2003, Ripley observed that 'the British faith in the US to come to the rescue was apparent'¹⁹. Phase IV operations relied heavily on the US Office for Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA) restoring Basra's infrastructure²⁰. Crucially, the organisation was extremely ineffective in applying a huge budget and was rapidly dissolved. Without US support, the mission Brims had set his division, 'to conduct security and stabilisation operations in order to set the conditions for Iraq becoming a stable, self-governing state', could not be achieved²¹. British commanders lacked an appreciation for the scale of the task that rebuilding Basra presented. The short-term approach to Basra's liberation, and intention to rapidly withdraw within a short timescale was highly unrealistic. Contingencies should have been implemented into the British operation allowing for flexibility should the US had been unable to deliver support.



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As demonstrated here with the above examples, a short-term approach during Operation Telic I manifested itself throughout British decision making. Although there appears to be substantiation in regard to the six-month deployment schedule, poor decision making at governmental level, as well as the failure of senior military commander to foresee the US inability to assist in the reconstruction of Basra, invariably contributed to the future instability of Iraq. Ultimately, decisions made with a short-term mentality damaged British reputation and resulted in culpability for setting the conditions in which the so-called Islamic State could rise in prominence.

¹⁹ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 153.

²⁰ Bailey, Iron & Strachan, *Blair's Wars*, p.74.

²¹ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 154.

²² T. Ripley, 'Basra Street Map 2003', Operation Telic (2003) [online]. Available at <http://operationtelic.co.uk/?p=154>.

Understanding the Iraq People

Fundamentally, the British Army lacked appreciation for the complex demographic of Iraq. As of 2003, the country's population was estimated to be at 24 million, of which 80% were Arab in ethnicity²³. Crucially 65% of this population were Shia Muslim, with Sunni Muslim contributing the vast majority of the remainder²⁴. This significant religious divide would go on to result in considerable friction during stabilisation operations²⁵. In the area surrounding Basra, the British region of interest, the population was almost entirely Shia. As a result of the Saddam Hussein regime, featuring an exclusively Sunni Muslim government, the region occupied by British forces during Operation Telic I had experienced a legacy of poor investment and ill-governance. This history of neglect in recent years furthered the significant divide in Iraq's population. Greenstock investigates the issues associated with this divide in his chapter titled 'The Shia Resist'²⁶. Specifically, the significant issues connected with re-establishing the Iraqi government, as well as addressing the need for proportional representation across the spectrum of the religious divide²⁷. The task of re-establishing governance in Iraq was inevitable. Therefore, identifying potential leaders prior to the invasion should have been a priority for coalition forces. Considering the significant intelligence and surveillance operations being conducted in the years prior to the invasion²⁸, such a task would not have been unreasonable.

Ripley takes the issues surrounding comprehension of the Iraqi people one step further than Greenstock, who simply investigated the associated predicaments. In his initial analysis of Operation Telic, he indicates issues with wider decision making.

'Key decisions were made on the basis of incomplete information, by politicians, diplomats, senior civil servants and military commanders who had little understanding of Iraq and the forces fighting British troops'²⁹.

Such a revelation is extremely concerning and indicates significant arrogance on behalf of those individuals on top of both the civil and military chains of command. It appears that there was a clear lack of subject matter experts regarding the Iraqi people and state present, when high level strategic decisions were made prior to the invasion. Without this critical information, re-establishing governance in Iraq was always going to encounter unanticipated issues. The failure of both

²³ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 30.

²⁴ Bailey, Iron & Strachan, *Blair's Wars*, p. 82.

²⁵ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 59.

²⁶ J. Greenstock, *Iraq: The Cost of War* (London: Arrow Books, 2016). p. 336-356.

²⁷ Greenstock, *The Cost of War*, p. 337.

²⁸ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 32.

²⁹ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 10.

Britain, and her coalition partners to identify individuals capable of stepping into leadership positions following the fall of the socialist Ba'ath Party regime, certainly contributed to a prolonged period of instability in the governance of Iraq.

Dictating the Future of Iraq

The third issue of focus encountered during Operation Telic I involves the roadmap laid for the future of a post Ba'ath Party Iraq. Critically, this was a roadmap laid by coalition forces, and not Iraqis. Following the fall of the Saddam Hussein regime, the first taste of what was dubbed 'street democracy' swept across Iraq³⁰. In Basra alone 50 new political parties were formed, all of which had their own vision for the future of Iraq³¹. Despite this flood of political expression and the drive of Iraqis to dictate their own future, the decision was still made to put the nation on a path dictated by western democracies. There was very little interest shown by coalition forces in the direction Iraqis wanted their nation to transition³². This decision was likely influenced by the media representation of the Iraqi people.

'This entirely superficial approach has succeeded in pigeon-holing Iraqis, either as sadistic henchman of the evil dictator Saddam Hussein, downtrodden victims of the so-called republic of fear, or fanatical Islamic terrorists bent on destruction and martyrdom'³³

As a result of this highly polarised representation of the Iraqi people, the impression is given that they are largely incapable of self-governance. Such an approach would only amplify growing Iraqi discontent with the presence of coalition forces in Iraq. Equally, providing greater credibility to the argument of Ba'ath party loyalists that the British had become occupiers³⁴. Alienating the Iraqi people from the political process and therefore the ability to shape their own nations future was never a sustainable course of action. Ultimately, decisions made rebuilding the Iraqi political structure during Operation Telic I would only aid the cause of future Insurgent activity, allowing for the substantiation of their actions.

³⁰ R. North, *Ministry of Defeat: The British War in Iraq 2003-2009* (London: Continuum, 2009). p. 19.

³¹ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 161.

³² Bailey, Iron & Strachan, *Blair's Wars*, p.87.

³³ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 30.

³⁴ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 37.

Commanders and Politicians

Prior to the invasion of Iraq on the 19th March 2003, exactly what role British forces would play in the conflict was shrouded in uncertainty. Politicians and senior military commanders had various options, and during the early stages of devising Operation Telic it was far from certain that the city of Basra would become central to the British campaign. The ultimate source of this uncertainty came from the British Prime Minister himself, Tony Blair. The Prime Minister, and his cabinet, were extremely averse to committing British troops to combat operations in Iraq³⁵. Such reluctance was as a result of overwhelming public opposition to the conflict. However, Blair had to balance this public backlash with British commitments to the international community. Specifically, as a NATO member state, under article 5 of the 1949 Washington Treaty, Britain was bound by the principle of 'collective defence'³⁶. Therefore, as a result of the attacks in New York on the 11th September 2001, and the support Iraq provided for the responsible Al Qaeda terrorist network, Britain maintained an obligation to support the US in military operations. Evidently, Blair found himself in a controversial, and arguably untenable situation.

Once Britain committed itself to supporting military action, the execution of the Iraqi invasion became a source of yet further indecision. Specifically, whether British forces would enter Iraq through Turkey, referred to as the 'northern option', or through Kuwait as had the previous Operation Granby³⁷. Having initially elected for the northern option, and after the considerable utilisation of resources planning the invasion under this pretence, British forces would ultimately launch their invasion from Kuwait – primarily as a result of Turkey refusing the proposition³⁸. Such a dramatic change to the Operation so late in planning undoubtedly hindered the preparations for Phase IV stabilisation operations³⁹. Actions taken in the political sphere, both in London and internationally had a tangible real-world impact on the events which unfolded during Operation Telic.

Having laid considerable blame upon politicians for the poorly organised invasion of Iraq, which in Ripley's opinion was an 'abject lesson on how not to go to war'⁴⁰, the role in which senior military commanders played in preparations should not be understated. Primarily, issues encompassed poor

³⁵ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 47.

³⁶ J. Stoltenberg, 'The North Atlantic Treaty', NATO (1949) [online]. Available at https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/stock_publications/20120822_nato_treaty_en_light_2009.pdf.

³⁷ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 46.

³⁸ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 46.

³⁹ Bailey, Iron & Strachan, *Blair's Wars*, p.70.

⁴⁰ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 38.

communication from military commanders regarding issues they were encountering to government ministers. Following the events of Operation Telic I, General Brims stated that 'not all of us communicated as well as we could' and when passing information to the Secretary of State for Defence 'we gave him huge briefing notes but not pithy points to make recommendations to cabinet'⁴¹. Serious inefficiency regarding the flow of information at the highest levels of the chain of command resulted in a considerable waste of both time and manpower perusing a redundant course of action. Had this not been the case, resources would have been freed to plan for the inevitable period of occupation and stabilisation operations. As this was not the case, shortcomings in the execution of Phase IV operations resulted in the Iraqi insurgency escalating. Elements of which would go on to form the so-called Islamic State⁴².

Infrastructure and Politics

Finally, the fifth issue regarding the political sphere encountered during Operation Telic I involves the failure of British forces to effectively restore crucial infrastructure nodes across Maysan province. Vital systems such as water supply, waste disposal, healthcare and provincial administration had all fallen into disrepair. When reflecting on this element of Phase IV operations, General Brims stated that he required 'different resources than were at my disposal'⁴³. Considering that Maysan province is the size of Northern Ireland, encompassing the major cities of Amarah and Basra, British forces were clearly faced with a considerable task⁴⁴. However, this was yet another eventuality of which commanders were aware that they would encounter. Therefore, considerable effort should have been made to set the conditions for post invasion reconstruction, be that through the utilisation of Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineering (REME) craftsman, or Royal Engineer (RE) sappers. This failure to sufficiently prepare for the scale of reconstruction which Maysan province required appears to be yet another symptom of the late switch from the proposed 'Northern Option'.

As a result of the extended period in which basic sanitation was absent, the British Army encountered 'a large number of very serious vomiting and diarrhoea cases caused by exposure to southern Iraq's unsanitary water system'⁴⁵. The outbreak significantly reduced available British fighting power resulting in a lack in engagement with the Iraqi population. This lack of interaction, combined with the widespread absence of basic infrastructure, contributed to a further decline in

⁴¹ R. Brims, 'Operation Telic and the British Army in the Iraq Campaign of 2003: A personal view', *Australian Army Journal*, 3, 1, (2005), p. 97.

⁴² Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 66.

⁴³ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 156.

⁴⁴ Bailey, Iron & Strachan, *Blair's Wars*, p.28.

⁴⁵ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 18.

relations. The potential devastating effect of which this could have had on the British campaign was mitigated by the utilisation of the unique skills and trades present within the deployed Army reservists⁴⁶. Skills of which were extremely useful during reconstruction efforts. Evidently, shortcoming present during Phase IV operations furthered Iraqi dissent for coalition forces.

An additional factor contributing to the slow reconstruction of basic infrastructure was the failure to effectively utilise local Iraqi expertise. In order to do so, there was a requirement to fill local administrative positions. However, one individual who held extreme promise in supporting the efforts of British forces in this regard, Muzahim al-Tamimi, was excluded from the discussion⁴⁷. This was as a result of his Ba'ath party connections, despite the fact that he belonged to the Shia community. Vital positions required in order to mobilise the Iraqi workforce were subsequently not filled, further extending the period of poor sanitation and spread of pestilence. British inability to provide the necessities of life permanently damaged relations with the local population. Undoubtedly, forcing individuals to support the Iraqi insurgency and ultimately further the cause of the eventual so-called Islamic State.

⁴⁶ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 156.

⁴⁷ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 162.

Chapter Three – Military Intervention

Introduction

Having engaged with multiple issues encountered during Operation Telic I, which were influenced by the political sphere, focus will now be placed on the application of military force. The faults of government and political leaders have been evaluated in great detail by popular media. However, strategic decisions made by senior military commanders, at times, also contributed to the deterioration of western sentiment in Iraq. This chapter will investigate specific failings relating to military intervention, examine a further five contentious issues encountered during Operation Telic. In doing so, the consequences of decisions made by senior military commanders will be brought into the scope of an Iraqi Insurgency gathering strength. With elements of this Insurgency going on to form the foundations of the so-called Islamic State⁴⁸, the conduct of this investigation is crucial in achieving the set objectives of the dissertation.

Unit Transitions

Due to the relatively condensed British six-month roulement, there became a necessity for information to be shared between current and replacement units. Such a process is referred to as a Relief in Place (RIP), and whilst arriving troops would be put through the Reception, Staging and Onward Integration (RSOI) process the flow of information between commanders would take place⁴⁹. Despite soldiers integrating well with their predecessors, conducting joint patrols in order to become attuned to the atmospherics of their new area of operation, Ripley outlines a serious issue in the flow of intelligence.

‘The chronic lack of information technology (IT) and the critically under-developed software meant that often key intelligence, such as files on known insurgents or maps of enemy positions, were often not in a structured format and were lost at the end of unit tours.’⁵⁰

This failure on behalf of military commanders, and intelligence cells, had a significant impact on the forward integration of units. Significantly, just under a third of all British fatalities during Operation Telic were as a result of either accidents, friendly fire or natural causes⁵¹. Often these friendly fire incidents were induced as a result of confusion regarding the location of the enemy. Had crucial

⁴⁸ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 66.

⁴⁹ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 15.

⁵⁰ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 15.

⁵¹ Bailey, Iron & Strachan, *Blair's Wars*, p.87.

intelligence regarding historic enemy firing points been delivered more effectively, it is plausible that some of these incidents may have been mitigated.

Another issue, symptomatic of ineffective unit transitions, was the desire of replacement commanders to develop their own approach in tackling issues. The root cause of this development lies with the requirement for military commanders to perform well during operational tours in order to achieve career progression⁵². Adopting a new approach during their tenure in command would further their credibility as military tacticians. However, a by-product of such action would lead to confusion, particularly on the part of Iraqi military partners. Constant alterations in approach undermined the development of a coherent strategy, as such Iraqis would be forced into constant adaptation as per the new commanders' intent⁵³. During Operation Telic I, a period in which focus should have been on both stabilisation and consistency, constant changes in British strategy undermined the mission. This issue replicated itself throughout the chain of command. Even the position of Basra Brigade Commander, considered a more demanding job than the General Officer Commanding (GOC), still experienced further complications as a result of transitions in senior officers filling the position⁵⁴.

Clearly, both the Relief in Place (RIP) and Reception, Staging and Onward Integration (RSOI) processes lacked the relevant infrastructure in order for them to be completely successful. The loss of intelligence during unit transitions greatly hindered British capability to launch offensive operations against the Iraqi Insurgency. Additionally, constant alterations in the commanders intent damaged combat effectiveness with the need for regular adaptation. These factors when combined, undermined Phase IV stabilisation operations and may well have prevented insurgent commanders from being specifically targeted. These High Value Targets (HVT's) would go on to utilise their experience combating coalition forces in future years under the guise of the so-called Islamic State⁵⁵. Clearly, these events demonstrate missed opportunities on the part of British forces which undoubtedly contributed towards the expansion of the so-called Islamic State.

⁵² Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 21.

⁵³ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 168.

⁵⁴ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 27.

⁵⁵ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 66.

Liberator to Occupier

During any expeditionary action, the support of the indigenous population for prolonged foreign military intervention is vital. The failure of British forces to adequately influence Iraqi sentiment in support of combat operations was a critical downfall of Operation Telic. Without the establishment of security in Basra and the wider Maysan province, reconstruction efforts could never be successful. Despite this failing, there was an early recognition by senior military commanders of the importance in maintaining the support of the Iraqi people. During Operation Telic I, and the transition into Phase IV stabilisation operations, General Brims identified that 'the centre of gravity for Phase IV was to be the positive support of the Iraqi population for Coalition Operations'⁵⁶. Despite an awareness of how significant maintaining a positive relationship with the Iraqi people would be, the transition of British forces from liberator to occupier in the eyes of the Iraqis was not prevented⁵⁷.

Following the successful capture of Basra as part of Operation Sinbad, and the defeat of 'Chemical Ali', initial reaction to British forces on the part of the Iraqi people was overwhelmingly positive⁵⁸. This promising sentiment displayed by the people of Basra was far greater than had been expected, on entering the city, both Generals Brims and Binns commented on their surprise that 'so many people were welcoming us'⁵⁹. However, in order to maintain a positive relationship with the indigenous population, bilateral communication was essential. Absent of this crucial element, Iraqi support for British operations was only ever going to be fleeting. Elation fuelled by the fall of the Ba'ath party regime would quickly burn out.

Critically, as the Iraqi Insurgency began to gather momentum, the engagement of British forces with the people of Basra dramatically decreased⁶⁰. Growing suspicion of the intentions behind the British presence, when combined with the myriad of factors already examined, led to a rapid deterioration in relations. This developing environment greatly benefited the Iraqi Insurgency. Evidently, a new approach was required in order to shift Iraqi attitude back in favour of British forces. One such initiative, referred to as a Female Engagement Team (FET), may well have achieved this desired effect. Female Engagement Teams (FETs) were first utilised during the Operation Herrick campaign in Afghanistan as a means of building a rapport with the female population⁶¹. Small units, usually fireteam strength, would be attached to infantry battalions. These purely female units would then

⁵⁶ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 154.

⁵⁷ Bailey, Iron & Strachan, *Blair's Wars*, p.102.

⁵⁸ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 139.

⁵⁹ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 148.

⁶⁰ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 18.

⁶¹ I. Carr, 'Female Engagement Teams Support Afghan Women', Ministry of Defence (2011) [online]. Available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/female-engagement-teams-support-afghan-women>.

have the ability to meet, and subsequently develop a relationship with the female population. A unique ability not possible with standard infantry units. This is due to local customs preventing male soldiers from communicating with the wives and daughters of Iraqi men. Had these specialised units been utilised during Operation Telic I, the breakdown in communication between British forces and the Iraqi population may well have been circumvented.

Ultimately, British forces failed to maintain the support of the Iraqi population. Ripley observed that 'Only in the honeymoon period of the Summer and Autumn of 2003 could British forces mingle freely with the local population'⁶². As Operation Telic progressed, the issue of poor civil engagement would only intensify. British forces became increasingly isolated from the civilian population. At this point in the conflict a vital balance was required, British forces on the ground had to limit their exposure to unnecessary risk. However, without a concerted effort to gather support for prolonged Phase IV operations, the situation was only going to deteriorate. As this was the case, the Iraqi insurgency continued to gather strength. The resulting instability in Maysan province can indeed be attributed to strategic objectives set by the British Army.

Law and Order

Immediately following the capture of Basra during the early stages of Operation Telic, maintaining the rule of law in the city became a substantial issue for the British Army. With the Iraqi Police Service (IPS) in disarray, Basra's population seized the opportunity to take revenge upon the evicted Ba'ath party regime⁶³. This came in the form of wide spread looting with the old regime's structures bearing the brunt of hostilities. However, the severity of the issue rapidly expanded, an eventuality which had not been anticipated by senior military commanders⁶⁴. This failure of foresight provides further evidence in criticism of the shockingly underdeveloped Phase IV stage of operations. Subsequently, there was no formal plan in place to deal with the detention of looters⁶⁵. With already over-stretched infantry units having to take the problems into their own hands, issues of poor Captured Persons (CPERS) handling began to emerge.

The most iconic example of this issue comes in the form of the revelations relating to the abuse of detainees in Camp Breadbasket⁶⁶. In this instance, images emerged showing both breaches of the Geneva Convention and Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC) by British soldiers. The circulation of these

⁶² Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 7.

⁶³ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 148.

⁶⁴ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 153.

⁶⁵ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 158.

⁶⁶ BBC, 'Iraq Abuse Case Soldiers Jailed', BBC NEWS (2005) [online]. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4296511.stm>.

images by popular media outlets substantially undermined support for British operations in Iraq. Following a court martial in 2005, three soldiers serving in the Royal Regiment of Fusiliers (RRF) would be prosecuted for their actions⁶⁷.

Ripley characterised the events at Camp Breadbasket as having ‘terrible shades of the internment exercise in Northern Ireland during the early 1970’s’⁶⁸. As well as damaging support for Operation Telic at home, the revelations further fuelled Iraqi resentment of the British presence in Iraq. In line with the rhetoric of the Iraqi insurgency, the events undoubtedly contributed to further instability in Maysan province. Critically, had Phase IV planning considered the extreme likelihood of issues relating to Law and Order, fatigued infantry soldiers may not have been left responsible for the detention of both looters and suspected insurgents. A role requiring the skillset of soldiers serving in the Royal Military Police (RMP).

Iraqi Hardware

In order to mount an effective insurgency against an occupying force, far more than just resentment is required to achieve victory. Specifically, a vast array of arms and munitions is vital. In the case of the Iraqi insurgency, British forces missed a significant opportunity to deny their enemy of this critical hardware. Despite speculation that Saddam Hussein had ordered preparations for the insurgency prior to the fall of the Ba’ath party regime, an investigation conducted by the Iraqi Perspectives Analyst could find no evidence in support of this theory⁶⁹. Therefore, insurgents and Ba’ath party loyalists must have obtained their arms following the British invasion and subsequent capture of Basra.

The approach adopted by the insurgency is one in which could have been easily circumvented by coalition forces. Following the defeat of the uniformed Iraqi Army, vast stores of arms and munitions had been abandoned in supply depots⁷⁰. Due to the overstretched nature of British forces during Operation Telic, there was a failure to adequately secure and dispose of this excess ordinance. Subsequently, future insurgents exploited this opportunity creating vast stockpiles of hardware. It would later be estimated by British commanders that enough small arms and heavy weapons were looted to fully equip two army divisions⁷¹. As Operation Telic I progressed, British forces began to encounter increasingly well-armed pockets of resistance⁷². An incident in April of 2003 in which the

⁶⁷ BBC, ‘Iraq Abuse Case Soldiers Jailed’, BBC NEWS (2005) [online]. Available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4296511.stm>.

⁶⁸ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 160.

⁶⁹ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 34.

⁷⁰ Bailey, Iron & Strachan, *Blair’s Wars*, p.100.

⁷¹ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 162.

⁷² North, *Ministry of Defeat*, p. 32-33.

Fusiliers and Black Watch discovered three caches of Improvised Explosive Devices (IED's) around Basra, highlights the gradual distribution of looted ordinance⁷³. Had emphasis been placed on securing the hardware necessary to mount armed resistance, the impact which the Iraqi Insurgency had upon British operations would undoubtedly have been mitigated.

Redeployment

The final issue relating to military intervention in Iraq features towards the conclusion of Operation Telic. Following the escalation of combat operation in Afghanistan during 2006, focus was beginning to shift away from Iraq⁷⁴. As a result, manpower issues which had been prevalent throughout the campaign were only further emphasised. Due to the stigma attached to British presence in Iraq, shifting focus onto Operation Herrick was favourable for both senior military commanders and political figures. However, as the realisation of how overstretched the British military had become in the Middle-East dawned, public support for continued intervention in Iraq was further undermined⁷⁵.

With the Iraqi Army far from an effective fighting force capable of maintaining security across the country, the British military was far too hasty in attempting to withdraw. In addition to the short-term impact on Operation Telic, reducing troop numbers and allowing the Iraqi insurgency greater freedom of movement, the decision to commit to yet another expeditionary operation in Afghanistan also had long-term effects on British doctrine. In absence of the time for the military to regroup following Operation Telic, allowing for the lessons of the conflict to be learnt, there was a danger that mistakes made in Iraq would once again be repeated in Afghanistan⁷⁶. Senior military commander greatly underestimated the importance of this post operational phase whilst also gravely overestimating their capabilities.

⁷³ Ripley, *Operation Telic*, p. 159.

⁷⁴ J. Mercer, *We Were Warriors: A Powerful and Moving Story of Courage Under Fire* (London: Pan Books, 2018). p. 75.

⁷⁵ J. Kirkup, 'Britain's Armed Forces 'stretched beyond their capabilities' by fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan', *The Telegraph* (2008) [online]. Available at <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/onthefrontline/2189180/Britains-Armed-Forces-stretched-beyond-their-capabilities-by-fighting-in-Iraq-and-Afghanistan.html>.

⁷⁶ North, *Ministry of Defeat*, p. 212-213.

Chapter Four – The Rise of the so-called Islamic State

Introduction

The organisation we know today as the so-called Islamic State has experienced many evolutions since initial inception. The terror network has been forced to adapt to a developing geopolitical environment in the Middle-East, many of these developments heavily influenced by coalition intervention during the invasion of Iraq in 2003. Having now established numerous failings in the Operation Telic campaign, the effect of these decisions on the terror networks development can be traced. Analysing the development of the so-called Islamic State will allow for a credible assessment to be made regarding British culpability in the organisations expansion.

Al-Qaeda in Iraq

It is important to consider that initial resistance to the British occupation of Basra, and the wider Maysan province, as part of Phase IV stabilisation operations was not as a result of large scale, organised networks. Instead, pockets of individuals and small communities, primarily of the Sunni Muslim ethnicity, aggrieved by British intervention launched spontaneous and opportunistic attacks⁷⁷. Clear connections can be drawn here between British actions during Operation Telic I, and how the early insurgency developed. Multiple factors already examined can be drawn upon, primarily the issues relating to infrastructure and politics as well as Iraqi hardware. The disengagement with the Iraqi population due to manpower shortages inflicted by poor sanitation led to heightened suspicion. This factor combined with a failure to prevent the distribution of stolen Iraqi Army hardware set the conditions for armed confrontation. An individual which would rise in prominence as a result of this conflict was Abu Musab al-Zarqawi⁷⁸.

Zarqawi would go on to be responsible for the formation of 'Al-Qaeda Jihad Organisation in the Land of the Two Rivers', known to coalition forces as 'Al-Qaeda in Iraq' (AQI)⁷⁹. Demonstrating a crucial development in the Iraqi insurgency, under Zarqawi's leadership attacks on British forces would no longer be from isolated pockets of resistance. Instead, they would be replaced by deliberate actions of a blossoming terror network exploiting the shortcomings of Operation Telic. Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) began to implement a deliberate strategy with three distinct objectives – the establishment of a base from which to launch operations, oppression of the Shia Muslim ethnicity, and unprecedented utilisation of the media⁸⁰. These objectives endured and are still hallmarks of the so-

⁷⁷ North, *Ministry of Defeat*, p. 21.

⁷⁸ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 61.

⁷⁹ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 64.

⁸⁰ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 64-67.

called Islamic State's agenda today. The ability of Zarqawi to develop his organisation in this manner can be attributed to both the British short-term approach and the issues identified in unit transitions. Had senior military commanders been capable of maintaining a larger contingent of British forces for the execution of Phase IV operations, the objective of Al-Qaeda in Iraq to establish a base in order to launch operations could have been blocked⁸¹. A larger British force would have resulted in far better ground domination, rather than the over-stretched reality due to an emphasis on rapid withdrawal. Secondly, the issues identified during unit transitions relating to the loss of intelligence on specific insurgent commanders prevented British forces from launching strike operations. Had individuals, such as Zarqawi himself been targeted, the network which at this stage still in infancy would have immediately lost cohesion.

Islamic State in Iraq

Following the death of Abu Musab al-Zarqawi in June 2006 at the hands of a US airstrike, the new leader of the terror network set the organisation on an alternate path with even greater aspirations⁸². Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took control of the now rebranded Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) during early 2010⁸³. Having earned a PhD in Islamic Studies whilst attending the University of Baghdad, the terror networks new leader provided an element of legitimacy to the organisations beliefs⁸⁴. Baghdadi was heavily influenced by the coalition invasion of Iraq in 2003 leading to the development of an ideology so radical that even Al-Qaeda would cut all ties with the organisation⁸⁵. The rapid expansion of the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) at this stage was aided greatly by the ineffectiveness of both the Iraqi Army and Police Service, a symptom of coalition forces dictating Iraq's future as well as the early redeployment⁸⁶. Ultimately, the institutions implemented by coalition forces failed to provide adequate security for the Iraqi people. Additionally, due to the premature withdrawal of British forces from Maysan province a combination of issues embedded. Primarily, the presence of a power vacuum. With the Iraqi Government incapable of filling the void, the Islamic State in Iraq (ISI) was well positioned to exploit the opportunity. Additionally, the British Army had not been provided adequate time to fully prepare a new Iraqi Army still in infancy⁸⁷. In the absence of British and wider coalition support, the Iraqi Army was ill prepared to combat a well embedded terror network.

⁸¹ Bailey, Iron & Strachan, *Blair's Wars*, p.70.

⁸² Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 69.

⁸³ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 72.

⁸⁴ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 72-73.

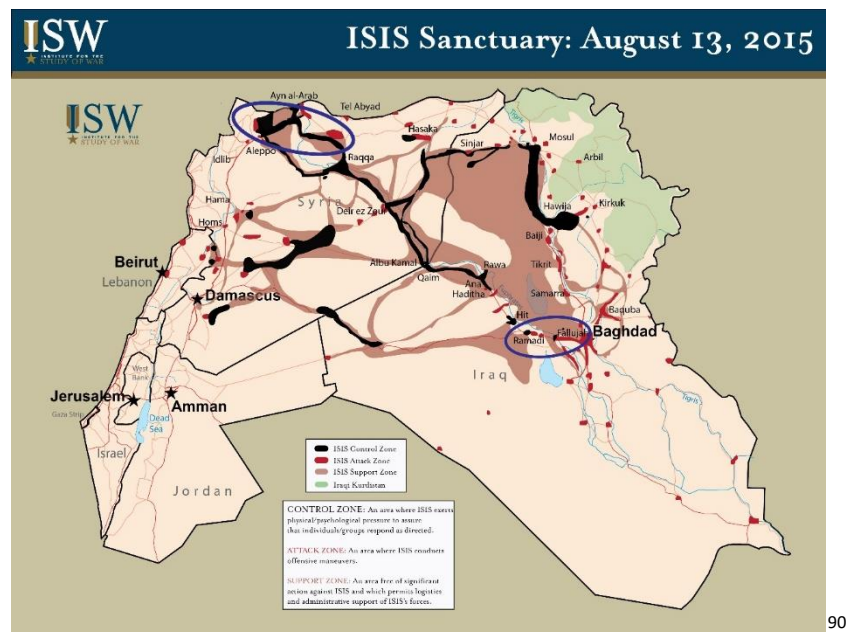
⁸⁵ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 75.

⁸⁶ North, *Ministry of Defeat*, p. 147-148.

⁸⁷ Bailey, Iron & Strachan, *Blair's Wars*, p.102.

Islamic State of Iraq and Syria

Following the expansion of the organisation across the Iraqi border and into Syria, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi made an announcement in the April of 2013 that he had rebranded the terror network to become the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS)⁸⁸. Having exploited the chaotic situation present in Syria during 2013, Baghdadi harnessed a host of new fighters from across the border bringing with them additional arms and equipment⁸⁹. Little time was wasted in applying the organisations newly discovered strength. As seen below, by the August of 2015 the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) had captured the major cities of Fallujah and Mosul.

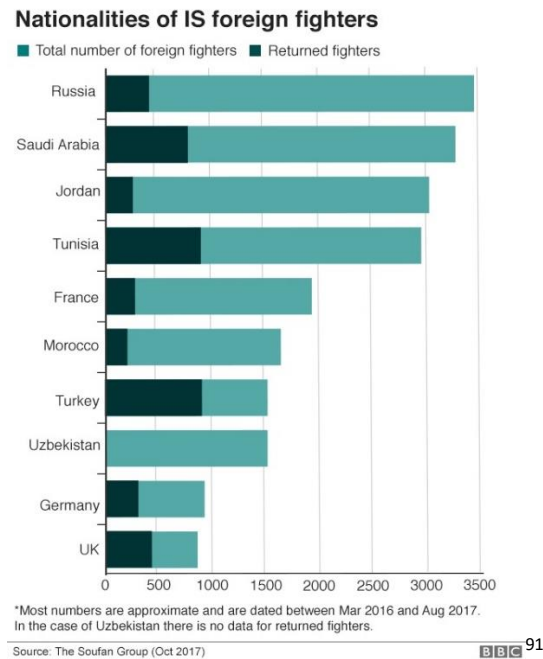


The objectives set by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi many years prior now seemed to finally have been realised. The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) had the ability to launch operations from any of the multiple cities under their control, strict Sharia Law implemented in their territories allowed for the persecution of the Shia population, and finally the propaganda war launched by the terror network was attracting a wealth of foreign fighters. Those individuals captivated by the ideology of the terror network travelled from locations around the globe to aid the fight in Iraq and Syria.

⁸⁸ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 77.

⁸⁹ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 77-78.

⁹⁰ K. Kagan, 'ISIS Sanctuary: August 13, 2015', Institute for the Study of War (2015) [online]. Available at <http://www.understandingwar.org/map/isis-sanctuary-august-13-2015>.



With the eventual backlash from the international community coming in 2014, the British military began an air campaign against the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) under Operation Shader⁹². However, there appears to remain a legacy of poor understanding of the Iraqi people. Due to sporadic engagements in the Shia dominated province of Maysan during Operation Telic, emphasis is placed on the Shia Muslim majority being the root cause of the Iraqi Insurgency. However, influential Sunni Muslim leaders such as Abu Musab al-Zarqawi and Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi were responsible for the development of organised resistance⁹³. Specifically targeting these individuals, as seen following the death of Zarqawi, substantially undermines the credibility of the terror network.

The final evolution of the organisation came on the 4th July 2014. During a speech on the first Friday of Ramadan, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi declared that the terror network would establish a new Islamic Caliphate, now referring to itself as the Islamic State⁹⁴. With Baghdadi no longer just the leader of the terror network, but as Caliph the leader of the Muslim faith, he claimed dominance over vast territories in both Iraq and Syria. Through the multiple cycles of evolution outlined in this chapter, the British military clearly missed key opportunities in combating Islamic militancy. Shortcomings of the Operation Telic campaign were repeatedly exploited by the Iraqi Insurgency, affording opportunity for the greater threat to develop into the so-called Islamic State.

⁹¹ The Soufan Group, 'Nationalities of IS foreign fighters', BBC (2017) [online]. Available at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-27838034>.

⁹² British Army, 'Deployments: Iraq', Ministry of Defence (2018) [online]. Available at <https://www.army.mod.uk/deployments/iraq/>.

⁹³ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 60.

⁹⁴ Burke, *Islamic Militancy*, p. 80.

Conclusion

Establishing connections between British presence in Iraq during Operation Telic and the subsequent conditions set allowing for the growth of the so-called Islamic State is a task which until now has not been tackled in scholarship. Instead, two distinct entities have been presented of which on the surface hold few parallels. However, through detailed analysis of British intervention in Iraq from 2003 until 2009, events have been identified which yield clear connections. Decisions made by government in the political sphere, followed by the strategic direction adopted by senior military commander on the ground in Iraq, demonstrate concerning shortcomings in Operation Telic. When tracing the development of the so-called Islamic State, there are clear instances in which the terror network exploited these shortcomings. Equally, evidence of missed opportunities on the part of British forces to mitigate and disrupt insurgent activity. It is vital to consider that many of the developments leading to deteriorating stability in Iraq were out of the control of British forces. In addition to only influencing the narrative in Maysan province, underlying ethnic divisions between the Iraqi Shia and Sunni Muslim population were a source of conflict far before the coalition intervention of 2003. Though crucially, this does not detract from the substantial failings made in Operation Telic.

The myriad of issues identified in the political sphere could easily have been circumvented by decisive decision making and enhanced planning. The decision to support US intervention in Iraq should have resulted in a firm commitment, or rejection, far sooner than highlighted. This early commitment would have avoided many of the symptoms encountered during Phase IV stabilisation operations – stemming from a condensed period of planning. Additionally, in any future expeditionary operation contingencies must be in place to undertake public order duties following any period of conventional warfighting. This commitment extends further than simply maintaining security. Attention must be paid to the reestablishment of crucial infrastructure and political organisation. A cornerstone of achieving these objectives is a willingness to maintain a substantial presence well into Phase IV operations. The short-term approach of both politicians and senior military commanders highlighted during Operation Telic was the single greatest issue of the campaign.

When ultimately forming an assessment of culpability in the expansion of the so-called Islamic State, Britain undoubtedly holds a degree of responsibility for setting the conditions in which the terror network could survive. Too many mistakes were made during Operation Telic for British forces to distance themselves from the organisations development. On multiple occasions, the fledgling Al-Qaeda in Iraq (AQI) exploited British shortcomings when opportunities were present for British

forces to substantially mitigate insurgent credibility. This is clearly demonstrated in the failure to secure Iraqi hardware. Absent these crucial arms and munitions, the transition into armed confrontation would have been severely impeded. Oversights in the delivery of Phase IV operations tainted the well-executed initial conventional warfighting period.

Simply reaching the conclusion that British intervention in Iraq was unnecessary would however be unjustified. The consequences of inaction may well have set in motion a chain of events with far more severe consequences than can be anticipated. Many spectators of British foreign policy in the middle east appear to disregard this fact, opting to condemn decisions made by those in positions of responsibility without fully appreciated the wider picture. Few would disagree that the execution of Operation Telic was not without fault. Subsequently, British presence in Iraq led to over a decade of instability which indeed fostered the conditions for the growth of the so-called Islamic State.

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