

# Breaking Iraq and Blaming Iran

## British Black Ops and the Terror Campaign in Basra

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Global Research, July 03, 2008

Global Research 3 July 2008

Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Terrorism](#)

### British Black Ops in Basra

In September of 2005, the southern Iraqi oil city of Basra, under British occupation since the 2003 invasion, was the scene of an extraordinarily controversial incident, which has since exposed the anatomy of the Anglo-American “dirty war” in Iraq, and in fact, the relevance to the wider “War on Terror”.

On September 19, 2005, two white men, dressed as Arabs, obviously suspicious to the British-trained Iraqi police, were pulled over in their car as they approached the city center of Basra. As the *Independent* reported, “the two men had been driving in an unmarked car when they arrived at a checkpoint in the city.” What followed was a confrontation between the two men and the Iraqi police, with shots fired and an Iraqi police officer killed and another wounded.[1] The men were then detained by the Iraqi police and taken to the central jail. As it turned out, the two men were members of the British elite SAS Special Forces.[2]

In an interview with *Al-Jazeera TV*, Fattah al-Shaykh, a member of the Iraqi National Assembly representing Basra, stated that, “I could see that the UK forces were always provoking the Iraqi people in Basra. There are indiscriminate arrests and pressure,” and that a representative of the British embassy informed him that, “two UK soldiers were trying to stir up disturbances. Explosive materials were found in their car and they opened fire.” He further elaborated that, “what the UK forces are doing is not necessarily known by the Iraqi forces or coordinated with them through exchange of information. There are occupation forces, armoured vehicles, tanks and military aircraft in Basra. Moreover, there are members of the British intelligence present in Basra especially, since Basra is currently a sensitive and important area in Iraq. There are members of the Central Intelligence Agency [CIA] and Mossad [word indistinct], as well as many institutions in this city.”[3]

British journalist Robert Fisk asked in an article he wrote on the subject, “what [were] our two SAS lads were doing cruising around Basra in Arab dress with itzy-bitsy moustaches and guns? Why did no one ask? How many SAS men are in southern Iraq? Why are they there? What are their duties? What weapons do they carry? Whoops! No one asked.”[4]

### The Great Escape

An astounding part of the story about the two British SAS agents is not simply what they were up to in Basra, but what happened to them after being arrested. Once arrested, they were questioned by Iraqi police, and as a Basra government official stated, “They refused to say what their mission was. They said they were British soldiers and to ask their commander

about their mission.”[5]

Within hours of the arrests, ten British tanks backed by helicopters stormed the jail where the men were held and destroyed the building, freeing roughly 150 Iraqi prisoners in the process.[6] However, the British government initially stated that the men were released as a result of negotiations. British Defense officials “insisted they had been talking to the Iraqi authorities to secure the release of the men, but acknowledged a wall was demolished as British forces tried to “collect” the two prisoners.”[7] The Basra Provincial Governor described the incident as “barbaric, savage and irresponsible.”[8]

Later, the story was changed again, as the British Army reported that they staged the “rescue” because after the two soldiers were arrested, they were “then handed over to a militia group,” and likely as a result of British pressure, “Iraq’s interior ministry ordered the police force in Basra to release the soldiers but that order was ignored.” Brigadier John Lorimer, who led the operation, said, “that under Iraqi law the soldiers should have been handed over to coalition authorities, but this failed to happen despite repeated requests.”[9] It should be noted, however, that the Iraqi law being referred to was written up by the Anglo-American Coalition Provisional Authority upon its initial occupation of the country in 2003.

As John Pilger noted in the *New Statesman*, “Although reported initially by the Times and the Mail, all mention of the explosives allegedly found in the SAS men’s unmarked Cressida vanished from the news. Instead, the story was the danger the men faced if they were handed over to the militia run by the “radical” cleric Moqtada al-Sadr.” He further reported on how what was found in the car included, “weapons, explosives and a remote-control detonator.”[10]

It is an amazing display of Orwellian double-think for the British to be able to be responsible for inciting terror, orchestrate a massive assault on an Iraqi police station with tanks and helicopters, and yet, somehow spin it so that it looks like a heroic act of patriotism of the kind depicted in the classic World War 2 film, *The Great Escape*, where British and American POWs undertake a massive escape from a German POW camp. Although, far from a heroic escape, or valiant rescue, this was an overt military operation aimed at returning British terrorists into British hands.

A month after the “rescue” operation, the British government “officially apologized to Iraq over the recent Basra events,” and a British statement “said that London apologizes to the Iraqi people and government, Basra residents, city and province councils and the police force over mistakes made by the British.”[11]

### **The Investigation Hits a Dead End**

The day after Britain officially apologized for terrorizing Basra, a “senior British military police officer in Iraq involved in the investigation of alleged abuse of Iraqi civilians by soldiers [has] been found dead at a camp in Basra.” Captain Ken Masters, commander of 61 Section of the Special Investigations Branch (SIB), “was found in his bed at the airport at the weekend.” The *Independent* quoted Defense sources as saying the death was “not due to hostile action and also not due to natural causes.” Friends referred to the incident as a “total surprise,” and it was reported that no suicide note or firearms were found.[12]

Masters’ job consisted of investigating all serious incidents involving the British military in

Iraq, and as the *Times* reported, “Captain Masters’s biggest current investigation was ordered after the incident on September 19 when two SAS troopers had to be rescued by British troops in armoured vehicles after they had been arrested by Iraqi police. During a day of violent confrontations, the Iraqi authorities in Basra claimed that seven Iraqis were killed and 43 injured, many of them police.” The article elaborated on Masters’ duties, stating, “Compensation to the families of alleged Iraqi victims who died during the fracas depended on the official investigation being carried out by Captain Masters and his team.”[13]

The British Ministry of Defense “said the circumstances surrounding the death on Saturday of Captain Ken Masters, 40, were not suspicious.”[14] The day before Masters died, the official line put forward by the British military of the Basra incident was that, “the SAS had been ordered to carry out surveillance operations against several members of the Iraqi police, who were believed to be responsible for torturing prisoners at the notorious Jamiyat prison in Basra.”[15]

Later, the official line put out after an investigation was that Masters did indeed kill himself, due to work pressures. Masters, who was a husband and father of two, was due to return home from tour five days after he apparently killed himself.[16]

### **The Christmas Day Massacre**

On December 25, 2006, the British again stormed the Basra headquarters of the serious crimes unit, the same police station where the SAS officers were held the previous September. The British killed seven men and destroyed the building, which “had been demolished with explosives after the pre-dawn assault by about 1,000 troops.” Further, “The operation came three days after British soldiers arrested the head and other members of the serious crimes unit on suspicion of involvement in the kidnap of two SAS soldiers and the murder of several Iraqis last year.” The “kidnap” being referred to here is an Orwellian double-speak version of the events describing the *arrest* of the two SAS officers for injuring and killing Iraqi police.

The official reason for the assault was that the serious crimes unit headquarters, “has long been accused of involvement in murders, attacks on coalition forces and kidnappings in the southern oil city, where rival Shia factions are fighting for control,” and that, “The British military acted after learning that some of the prisoners, all suspected criminals, inside the police station faced imminent execution.” Captain Dunlop stated, “We had clear directions from the prime minister and governor to dissolve the unit.”[17]

Three days earlier, on December 22, 2006, the “senior Iraqi policeman who allegedly masterminded the abduction of two SAS soldiers last year was arrested yesterday following a major security operation in Basra.” In other words, the senior Iraqi officer who was present for the arrest, detention and questioning of the SAS soldiers was taken into British custody. The *Telegraph* reported that, “Under cover of thick fog, 800 British troops in tanks and armoured vehicles swooped on the home of the policeman and six other Iraqi officers.” The *Telegraph* again re-wrote history when they reported that, “The two SAS troopers were allegedly minutes away from being sold to insurgents and certain death after they were abducted by rogue police at a checkpoint in the Jamiat area of Basra on Sept 19 last year.”[18]

In reaction to the storming and total destruction of the Serious Crimes Unit HQ in Basra, the

Basra Council “described the raid as illegal and has suspended co-operation with the military,” and called the raid “provocative.” Notably, “A Ministry of Defence spokesman said 1,000 troops were involved and hundreds of seized files and computers have been taken as evidence.”[19] What exactly was contained on those files and computers? As reported by the *New York Times*, the “battle lasted nearly three hours. There were no British casualties, but the streets around the station were littered with bombed-out cars and rubble.”[20]

Considering the fact that the mainstream media and British officials put massive spin on and manipulated the facts of the story about the SAS soldiers in relation to this story, it raises the question as to what they may be lying about in relation to the actual storming of the prison once again. What exactly was the purpose of this massive undertaking? Surely, the police forces in Iraq are corrupt and influenced by local militias; it is, after all, a state of war. But, it seems that as long as the corruption is in line with Anglo-American strategy in the region, a blind-eye is turned. Was the real problem that the Serious Crimes Unit was actually doing its job, investigating the Basra incident involving the SAS? This could explain why the computers and files were taken. The current official line that the SAS were investigating corrupt officials can support why they were dressed as Arabs. But as to why they were heavily armed, had explosives and detonators and were the first ones to shoot during the confrontation with the police, this explanation does not stand up to scrutiny.

Also, to storm the jail under the pretense of preventing torture and executions is highly hypocritical considering what the Coalition is guilty of in Iraq and around the world. So, it begs the question, what else is being lied about in this situation, and for what purpose?

### **The British Follow the Paper Trail**

Following very much in line with previous British actions in Basra, from the 2005 “rescue” of black-ops SAS state-terrorists, to the 2006 destruction of the jail, “rescue” of its computer records and arrest of its leading officials, the British again made their destabilizing presence known. On March 4, 2007, “Iraqi special operation forces and British troops swept into an Iraqi intelligence ministry building” in Basra, and, “found prisoners with signs of torture, British officials said.” Interestingly, “All 30 prisoners escaped during the surprise raid, which was triggered by information gleaned from suspects arrested hours earlier in another sweep.” The public explanation for the raid is very much the same as the previous Basra raid a year earlier, which actually appeared to be an operation aimed at retrieving information about and arresting all the officials involved with the previous year’s arrest of the two SAS soldiers. Officially, this 2007 raid was undertaken to “rescue” abused prisoners.

Iraqi Prime Minister, Nouri al-Maliki, referred to the raid as an “unlawful and irresponsible act.” As the *Washington Post* reported, “A British military statement said its forces acted quickly because it had gained information hours earlier that presented a high threat.”[21] According to the *Telegraph*, the British captured “an alleged death squad leader and four other militants.” The article further reported that, “A British military spokesman said it had not been possible to warn the provincial authorities before the raid because it was ordered just hours earlier, on the basis of information received from a detained insurgent.” About the prisoners that escaped during the raid, “the British denied they were deliberately freed, saying they “regrettably” took advantage of the chaos to make their escape.”[22]

The Iraqi Prime Minister released a statement saying that he “has ordered a prompt investigation into the incident of breaking into the security complex headquarters in Basra and he affirmed the need to punish those who have carried out this unlawful and

irresponsible act.”[23] The *BBC* reported on the incident, stating that, “The British government said the Army’s main bases in the city [of Basra] would be closed and the total British strength reduced by several thousand over time,” and that, “The theory behind this is that the Iraqi forces are now ready to take over. The raids over the weekend were indeed led by the Iraqi security forces – but targeted other parts of the Iraqi security forces.”[24]

The question must be asked: What was the mission *really* about? Surely, and sadly, the only unique prison in Iraq would be one where torture does not occur, regardless of who is in control of it. And to say certain facilities under Iraqi government control are corrupt and involved in supporting terrorists and death squads is a diversionary point, as the Iraqi government itself is under Anglo-American control. The fact that the Iraqis were not told of this raid not only demonstrates that the British (and Americans) act above the law, but that the raid was something they did not want to have known by the Iraqis. There was a purpose behind the raid on the prison. It is important to note that it occurred a mere three months after the previous raid in December of 2006, in which the British seized “hundreds of files” and took computers “as evidence,” likely related to the British SAS incident. Since this was the Iraq intelligence unit in Basra, could it be that the previously destroyed Serious Crimes Unit had passed along some intelligence to the Iraqi Intelligence Ministry building? It would seem likely. And so, it would also seem to be likely that the British would follow the paper trail of evidence with their trail of terror.

### **The British Withdraw?**

In an August, 2007 article, the *Washington Post* reported that, “As British forces pull back from Basra in southern Iraq, Shiite militias there have escalated a violent battle against each other for political supremacy and control over oil resources, deepening concerns among some U.S. officials in Baghdad that elements of Iraq’s Shiite-dominated national government will turn on one another once U.S. troops begin to draw down.” The article quoted a think tank called the International Crisis Group (ICG) as saying that Basra is plagued by “the systematic misuse of official institutions, political assassinations, tribal vendettas, neighborhood vigilantism and enforcement of social mores, together with the rise of criminal mafias that increasingly intermingle with political actors.”[25]

In September of 2007, amid widespread disenchantment among the British for their participation in the Iraq war and occupation, the British “pulled out of Basra Palace, the onetime southern residence of Saddam Hussein that became the symbol of the UK’s role in the US-led invasion.” As the *Independent* reported, “The British departure from their last remaining base inside the walls of Basra City, signalled their disengagement from the conflict and has highlighted a growing and public discord between Washington and London over Iraq, with the Americans claiming the move will severely undermine security.” The British were to remain at Basra airport only, which is on the outskirts of the city, “while what remains of the British-controlled south is handed over to the Iraqi authorities.” One Iraqi who is a resident of Basra was quoted as saying, “One thing we are uneasy about are rumours that the Americans may come to Basra to replace the British. We see what is happening in Baghdad and we don’t want that here.”[26]

On September 12, 2007, it was reported by the *Independent* that, “British forces have been sent from Basra to the volatile border with Iran amid warnings from the senior US commander in Iraq that Tehran is fomenting a “proxy war”,” and that, “The deployment came within a week of British forces leaving Basra Palace, their last remaining base inside Basra city, and withdrawing to the airport for a widely expected final departure from Iraq.”



The move to the Iranian border was apparently at the request of the Americans, as “The move came as General David Petraeus, the US commander in Iraq, and Ryan Crocker, the US ambassador to Iraq, made some of the strongest accusations yet by US officials about Iranian activity. General Petraeus spoke on Monday of a “proxy war” in Iraq, while Mr Crocker accused the Iranian government of “providing lethal capabilities to the enemies of the Iraqi state”.”[27]

In December of 2007, the British officially “handed over control of Basra Province to Iraq’s government,” and as the *New York Times* reported, “American officials believe the transfer of control will be a serious test of Iraqi political and military leaders to maintain Basra — a strategically vital and politically fractious southern province, and the port city of the same name — under Iraqi control, and prevent Iran or Shiite militias from gaining too much influence.” However the British would remain in a “support role” in the Iraqi province that “holds most of Iraq’s proven petroleum reserves.” A British General was quoted as saying, “We will continue to help train Basra security forces.”[28]

So was the British departure from Basra really a drawing down of participation in the war? Was it for political legitimacy within the UK? Or, was there another reason behind this action? Basra’s strategic importance cannot be underestimated, being in the south of Iraq, the most oil-rich province, close to Iran and in the heart of the Gulf.

The British used to govern Iraq under a League of Nations mandate from its “independence” from the Ottoman Empire until 1932. In 1940, an anti-British nationalist leader, Rashid Ali, came to power in Iraq. After engaging in closer relationships with fascist Italy and quietly with Nazi Germany, he was replaced in 1941 as Prime Minister. A few months later, he orchestrated a coup d’état and returned to power. The British immediately responded by seizing Basra, what was seen, even then, as a vital supply route. The British also had a major military base in Basra. Significantly, also in 1941, Iran’s King was developing close ties to Germany. Britain was afraid of Iran’s oil reserves falling out of the hands of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (now known as BP – British Petroleum), and into hands of Germany. So, a couple months after Britain took back Iraq, the British and USSR launched a joint invasion of Iran. The British of course invaded from the south in Iraq, from their bases, notably their base in Basra.

Could this glimpse into the past present any understanding of the present British situation in Basra? Considering that the British went from Basra and moved to a base on the Iranian border, it seems likely. But why leave Basra? Well, if the strategy of tension in the Middle East is directed at destabilizing the region, spilling civil war and conflict across borders,[29] perhaps it might be necessary for the British to step back and see if Basra collapses in on itself. Or perhaps, there would be some outside help in Basra’s implosion, but without the British forces present, foreign involvement would not be discussed as a cause of the problem, and could therefore be discussed as a possible solution to any implosion.

### **The Battle of Basra**

Three months after handing control of Basra over to the Iraqis, a large battle was underway. The western media tenaciously referred to it as the “*Battle of Basra*.” On March 24, 2008, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki went to Basra to oversee the planned Iraqi offensive to rid Basra of its Mahdi Army militia in key Sadrist neighborhoods of those loyal to Mahdi Army leader, Muqtada al-Sadr. This was the first major operation undertaken by the Iraqi Army.

The Battle lasted until March 31, resulting in hundreds of dead and significantly hundreds more wounded. During the battle, British papers such as the *Times* were calling for Britain to abandon its withdrawal timetable from the base outside of Basra, in order to remain in case of a need to “rescue” Basra.[30]

The Iraqi government forces were surprised by the resilience of the Mahdi Army in Basra, and were suffering a great deal at the defenses of the militia. This resulted in American forces having to be drawn into the battle to support the Iraqi government forces. US warplanes were used, ultimately killing civilians, and even the British were drawn into the fighting directly from their base at the airport. The *Independent* reported that, “If US and British forces engage in direct military action on a wide scale with the Sadrist militia, then Mr Sadr could call for a general uprising, which would engulf all of Shia Iraq in war.”[31] According to the *BBC*, “There have also been a small number of both British and American special forces on the ground” in Basra during the Battle.[32]

It was on March 29, that Muqtada al-Sadr called for a ceasefire between the Shi’a militia and Iraqi forces. The *Independent* reported that, “The Sadrists’ ceasefire was unexpected since they have prevented government forces from advancing in Basra and Baghdad. Hours before the announcement, militiamen stormed the state television station in Basra, forcing the guards to flee and setting armoured vehicles on fire.”[33] As it turned out, the ceasefire between Iraqi government officials and Sadr’s militia was brokered by Iran. *USA Today* reported that, “Iran has close ties with both al-Sadr’s movement and [Prime Minister] al-Maliki, who spent several years in exile there,” and that, “the agreement was brokered by the commander of Iran’s al-Quds Brigade, which is considered a terrorist organization by Washington.”[34]

### **What was Behind the Battle of Basra?**

How exactly did the Battle of Basra begin, other than the initial attack by government forces? What was the reasoning and purpose behind this major offensive? Surely, a puppet government such as Iraq would never undertake such an operation without in the very least, the support of the Americans or British, but even more likely, at the direction of the Anglo-Americans. The Battle of Basra must be put into a wider context.

A week before the Battle broke out, Vice President Dick Cheney took a surprise tour of the Middle East. If George Bush is the “Decider” as he once proclaimed, Dick Cheney is certainly the “Destabilizer,” not to mention, the “Decider’s Decider.” On March 17, Cheney made a surprise, unannounced visit to Iraq, where his “first meeting was a classified briefing with U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker and Gen. David Petraeus, the top U.S. military commander in Iraq who met him at the airport.” He also met with Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki. Among many of the possible topics of discussion during Cheney’s trip was that, “The Iraqis do not yet have a law for sharing the nation’s oil wealth among the Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds, a law that the Bush administration believes will trigger multinational energy companies to invest in exploration and production in Iraq,” as well as, “a plan for new provincial elections. Iraq’s presidential council, which must give its nod to laws passed by the Iraqi parliament, rejected a plan for new elections last month, shipping it back to the legislature.” The rejection was seen as “a setback to the U.S. campaign for national reconciliation, [which] came despite Cheney’s last-minute phone call to the main holdout on the three-member panel: Vice President Adel Abdul-Mahdi, a Shiite.” Cheney’s trip included visits to Oman, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and the Palestinian territories.[35]

Among much of the discussion regarding Cheney's trip to the Middle East was rumours of preparing for a possible war with Iran. As the *Telegraph* reported, "Mr Cheney, whose nine-day tour has included stops in Turkey, the Gulf and Afghanistan, insisted that Iran must not be allowed to develop nuclear weapons." [36] A surge of violence in Basra would provide Cheney with a convenient excuse to point the finger at Iran for "troublesome meddling" in Iraq.

It is important to take a closer look at possible reasons for the outbreak of violence in Basra in late March, a mere nine days after Cheney's visit to Iraq. The main reasons, (none of which include the Iraqi government's "decision" to displace the Mahdi Army), include scoring political points on the war issue in domestic American politics, passing an Iraqi oil law, pressing forward with provincial elections, building the case or creating a pretext for a war with Iran, and justifying a permanent occupation of Iraq.

### Scoring Political Points

At Congressional hearings in early April following the Basra offensive, where Ambassador to Iraq Ryan Crocker and General David Patraeus testified, Senator Ted Kennedy asked Crocker, "Were you at any meetings with the Vice President... where the issue of the Basra invasion took place?" Crocker responded, "Um, that was not discussed." Kennedy pressed, "It wasn't discussed at all, during the Vice President's visit to Baghdad, ah, that the, the possibility of Maliki uh, going into Basra, was not discussed, you were not at any meetings where the Vice President was present or where this was discussed in his presence?" Crocker again replied, "Uh, it was not discussed in any meeting I attended, no, sir." Kennedy then looked to General Patraeus, "Ah, General?" Patraeus replied, "Same, Senator."

Ray McGovern, former 27-year CIA analyst who delivered several daily intelligence briefings to US Presidents, stated that, "I think Kennedy knows more than the rest of us know. I think it's very clear that if you're looking for why Maliki went off half-cocked for a big offensive down against Moqtada al-Sadr in southern Iraq, it was because Cheney had told him to. And I would be shocked if Cheney didn't tell Patraeus and Crocker what he was going to tell Maliki." He continued, "Patraeus has hundreds of troops there [in Basra] embedded with the Iraqi forces, he had to know exactly what was going on. He just couldn't stop it. Why? Well, well he didn't want to stop it because Cheney is running things. The plan was to get down there into the south to show that this fellow [Maliki] can take the initiative and be - well, the President was instructed two days later to say this was a 'defining moment' - a defining moment of the leadership of Prime Minister Maliki. Well, yeah, it was, but not the way they meant." McGovern elaborated, "And so Patraeus and Crocker could come before Congress and say, 'look, you told us - you told us last time that the Iraqis had to take more initiative, so that we're not doing the fighting. Well, look, just what happened, they cleaned out the whole of southern Iraq. And they still played that theme... [that] Maliki took the initiative." He further stated, "Ironically, they wanted to give the initiative to Maliki because they thought it might succeed, but then they wanted to give the initiative to Maliki because it failed miserably." [37]

### The Oil Law

Iraq has failed to pass an oil law for some time. Basra, the most oil rich province in Iraq, is of vital importance in any decision made regarding an oil law. In 2001, before 9/11,



Afghanistan, and Iraq, Vice President Cheney met in secret with executives from Exxon Mobil Corp., Conoco (before its merger with Phillips), Shell Oil Co. and BP America Inc., in what was known as the Cheney Energy Task Force.[38]

Interestingly, Judicial Watch, a public interest group and government watchdog, sued to get Commerce Department documents pertaining to Cheney's secret Energy Task Force meetings. The documents contained "a map of Iraqi oilfields, pipelines, refineries and terminals, as well as 2 charts detailing Iraqi oil and gas projects, and 'Foreign Suitors for Iraqi Oilfield Contracts'." Further, "The Saudi Arabian and United Arab Emirates (UAE) documents likewise feature a map of each country's oilfields, pipelines, refineries and tanker terminals. There are supporting charts with details of the major oil and gas development projects in each country that provide information on the projects, costs, capacity, oil company and status or completion date." [39]

Months after the Battle at Basra and Cheney's visit, the *International Herald Tribune* reported that, "The Iraqi Oil Ministry is negotiating with Royal Dutch Shell on a joint venture deal to develop natural gas associated with oil production in southern Iraq," and that, "The head of the Basra Economic Development Committee, Munadhil Abid Khanjar, said that Shell had approached the Oil Ministry last December with its plans and since then meetings have been held outside Iraq." [40] Two days later, it was reported that, "Four Western oil companies are in the final stages of negotiations this month on contracts that will return them to Iraq, 36 years after losing their oil concession to nationalization as Saddam Hussein rose to power." The main oil companies are "Exxon Mobil, Shell, Total and BP — the original partners in the Iraq Petroleum Company — [and they], along with Chevron and a number of smaller oil companies, are in talks with Iraq's Oil Ministry for no-bid contracts to service Iraq's largest fields, according to ministry officials, oil company officials and an American diplomat." It was further reported that, "The no-bid contracts are unusual for the industry, and the offers prevailed over others by more than 40 companies, including companies in Russia, China and India." [41]

So, if Cheney's visit to Iraq was to do with oil, then, *Mission Accomplished*. However, it doesn't seem likely that this was the reasoning behind the outbreak of violence in Basra. Surely, it was a topic of discussion between Cheney and Iraqi officials, however, it does not account for a push for violence in Basra, unless it is an issue of legitimizing a permanent occupation of the oil rich Basra province under the auspices of "stabilizing" the volatile region, but in reality, maintaining a presence there to protect the oil fields for Royal Dutch Shell, Exxon, and BP.

### The Provincial Elections

In February of 2008, it was reported that, "Iraq's three-member presidency council has rejected a draft law to hold provincial elections and returned it to parliament," and that, "The bill is expected to boost the powers of the provinces to launch their own economic projects with the money allocated by the central government." [42] Two days after Cheney's visit, "Iraq's three-member presidential council on Wednesday approved legislation that sets a time frame for provincial elections, a development that Iraqi lawmakers called an important step toward reconciling rival factions in the divided government." [43] This appears to be following the directions of the Council on Foreign Relations, among many other think tanks, in balkanizing Iraq, or as they put it, reverting to a federal system. Although pushing for a federal system for Iraq came after initial calls for a "three state

solution,” as was the title of a Leslie Gelb article in the *New York Times*, who is President Emeritus of the Council on Foreign Relations.[44] The article he wrote called for the Balkanization of Iraq based upon the model of Yugoslavia, which, incidentally, was fractured largely through Western-financed, Al-Qaeda affiliated terrorist organizations in Bosnia and Kosovo.[45]

President Bush said in a speech on March 27, 2008, during the Battle of Basra, that, “Last week, leaders reached agreement on a provincial powers law that helps define Iraqi federalism, and sets the stage for provincial elections later this year. And that’s an important piece of legislation because it will give Iraqis who boycotted the last provincial election — such as Sunnis in Anbar or Ninewa provinces — a chance to go to the polls and have a voice in their future.”[46]

Reverting to a more federal system will allow for the political fracturing of Iraq. Not only will it separate the regions likely according to Sunni, Kurd and Shi’a factions, but it will allow bigger powers, such as the United States and the United Kingdom, to not have their influence threatened by any actual strengthened and united Iraqi federal government.

As the *Berkeley Daily Planet* reported after the Battle of Basra, Muqtada al-Sadr, as a nationalist, “supports a unified Iraq with a strong central government,” while Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki has “pushed for dismembering Iraq into separate provinces dominated by the country’s three major ethnic groups—Sunnis in the west, Kurds in the north, and Shiites in the south. Since most of the oil reserves are in the south, as is the country’s only port, whoever controls the south essentially controls 70 percent of Iraq’s economy.” Further, the provincial election law that was passed “sets up an October election in which the various provinces will vote on whether they want to remain a unified country or splinter into separate provinces.”[47] The author stipulates that Maliki attacked Basra in an effort to win political points in driving out the militias in order to win the Basra provincial election come October, and thus, retain control over the oil reserves.

However, my problem with this hypothesis is that in the originally proposed recommendations from the Council on Foreign Relations in turning Iraq into a federal system, they state that oil laws are to be the prerogative of the federal government, not provincial.[48] Not to mention, Maliki has slim, if any chance, of ever winning the south of Iraq. Thus, it may be more likely that in attacking Basra, it creates great resentment among Shi’as and thusly, a federal political system will be so fractured and divided that it will likely lead to separation naturally. If the Iraqi provinces separated of their own accord, it would be harder to point the finger at the US for the balkanization of Iraq, which has long been a strategic aim.[49] [50] [51] When the US Senate passed a resolution in support of a federal system as a solution for Iraq, the Arab world, and even the Iraqi Prime Minister denounced it as an attempt to divide Iraq. But, if the Iraqi Parliament passes a law for provincial elections, which could lead to fracture, it is a “break through for democracy.”

## Promoting War With Iran

The *Financial Times* reported prior to Cheney’s trip to the Middle East that, “On Iran, the vice-president is expected to urge countries in the region to do more to isolate Tehran diplomatically and economically,” and that, “The trip comes at a time of renewed interest in policy towards Iran after a senior US military commander resigned last week because of perceived differences with the White House over the issue. Admiral William Fallon was

widely considered a dovish voice on Iran and his departure sparked speculation that hawkish figures such as Mr Cheney were regaining the upper hand over the issue.”[52] The day after Cheney visited Saudi Arabia, the government began preparing “national plans to deal with any sudden nuclear and radioactive hazards that may affect the kingdom following experts’ warnings of possible attacks on Iran’s Bushehr nuclear reactors.”[53]

The outbreak of violence in Basra delivered the perfect opportunity to continue doing what the administration has been doing for so long, blaming Iran for the violence in Iraq. Amid the heated Battle of Basra, on March 27, it was reported that, “The U.S. military stated Iran is orchestrating the Shi’ite insurgency in southern Iraq and outbreaks of violence throughout the country,” and a Defense Department spokesman stated that, “There has been a persistent and troublesome meddling by Iran.”[54]

A month later, the US envoy to the United Nations blamed Iran “for fueling recent clashes in the southern Iraqi city of Basra and in Baghdad, saying Tehran was training and supplying weapons to militias.” Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and signatory to several PNAC documents, stated, “The recent clashes between criminal militia elements and Iraqi government forces in Basra and Baghdad have highlighted Iran’s destabilizing influence and actions.”[55] However, what he (intentionally) failed to realize is that Sadr had declared a ceasefire long before the Battle of Basra began, from August of 2007, (interestingly at the time that Bush’s “surge” strategy in Iraq became a “success” in reducing violence), and that the Battle began when the Iraqi government attacked Sadr strongholds in Basra. Khalilzad also mistakenly blamed Iran for being a destabilizing force. Yet, it was Iran that brokered the ceasefire, making Iran the most stabilizing force in the region.

On June 6, 2008, it was reported that, “Pentagon officials firmly opposed a proposal by Vice President Dick Cheney last summer for airstrikes against Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) bases by insisting that the administration would have to make clear decisions about how far the United States would go in escalating the conflict with Iran, according to a former George W. Bush administration official.” The report continued, “J. Scott Carpenter, who was then deputy assistant secretary of state in the State Department’s Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, recalled in an interview that senior Defence Department (DoD) officials and the Joint Chiefs used the escalation issue as the main argument against the Cheney proposal,” and that Cheney had proposed “launching airstrikes at suspected training camps in Iran.” It further stated that, “The question of escalation posed by DoD officials involved not only the potential of the Mahdi Army in Iraq to attack, Carpenter said, but possible responses by Hezbollah and by Iran itself across the Middle East,” and that, “Cheney’s proposal was perceived as a ploy to provoke Iranian retaliation that could used to justify a strategic attack on Iran.”[56]

Cheney’s plan to provoke Iran through airstrikes on camps in Iran was rebuked by the Pentagon, and the attempt at scaring the world with threats of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons was rebuked by the National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) of all 16 US intelligence agencies in December of 2007, which said that Iran gave up attempting to build nuclear weapons in 2003.[57] It was even reported that Cheney tried to suppress the NIE from becoming public for over a year.[58] It seemed as if provoking a situation within Iraq was the best option for Cheney. However, because Iran acted quickly in ending the violence and brokering a ceasefire, Cheney’s plan backfired.

## Permanent Occupation

Having a massive outbreak of violence in Iraq could have provided an excellent reason to justify a permanent occupation of Iraq. On April 8, 2008, a week after the fighting in Basra reached a ceasefire, the *Guardian* reported that, "A confidential draft agreement covering the future of US forces in Iraq, passed to the Guardian, shows that provision is being made for an open-ended military presence in the country," and that the "secret" and "sensitive" agreement was dated "March 7," and, "is intended to replace the existing UN mandate and authorises the US to "conduct military operations in Iraq and to detain individuals when necessary for imperative reasons of security" without time limit." [59]

On June 5, it was reported by the *Independent* that, "A secret deal being negotiated in Baghdad would perpetuate the American military occupation of Iraq indefinitely, regardless of the outcome of the US presidential election in November," and that, "Iraqi officials fear that the accord, under which US troops would occupy permanent bases, conduct military operations, arrest Iraqis and enjoy immunity from Iraqi law, will destabilise Iraq's position in the Middle East and lay the basis for unending conflict in their country." Further, "Under the terms of the new treaty, the Americans would retain the long-term use of more than 50 bases in Iraq. American negotiators are also demanding immunity from Iraqi law for US troops and contractors, and a free hand to carry out arrests and conduct military activities in Iraq without consulting the Baghdad government." The article reported that, "The Iraqi government wants to delay the actual signing of the agreement but the office of Vice-President Dick Cheney has been trying to force it through. The US ambassador in Baghdad, Ryan Crocker, has spent weeks trying to secure the accord." [60]

Important to note is that, "The agreement artfully drafted by US officials will not only jeopardize the Iraqi sovereignty but will also give the US military the right to use Iraq as a launching pad for attacks against other countries, including Syria and Iran." [61] As of June 19, "Iraqi and U.S. officials are seeking a compromise on the pending issues over a new security agreement between the two countries." [62]

## Concluding Remarks

Understanding the anatomy of the conflict that has raged in Basra since 2003 is a pivotal study in understanding the wider "War on Terror." The British, for nearly a century maintaining a destabilizing presence in the region, notably in Basra, have not given up their Empire's long-standing tradition of "Divide and Conquer." From the two SAS terrorist, to their dramatic "rescue," the destruction of the Serious Crimes Unit and eventually, the liquidation of the Basra Intelligence Ministry, the British have maintained a position of being above the law and beyond moral restraint.

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