Operation IRAQI FREEDOM: Coalition operations

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The overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime during the combat phase of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM between March and May 2002 marked the culmination of many years of cooperation between US and British forces in the Middle East, brought together for Operation DESERT STORM and remaining for 12 years policing the Northern and Southern No-Fly Zones over Iraq side-by-side. In this article, the author attempts to identify the issues and challenges posed by coalition operations in Iraq as a way of understanding how to maintain and best nurture the close professional military relationship that exists between the USAF and the RAF as we look, collectively, to the future.

It is just 22 months since the US-led coalition entered the final planning phase in the run-up to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. At the time, the debate was raging about whether the United States was going to be forced to 'go it alone'.[1] In a press briefing on 11 March 2003, Donald Rumsfeld said that the US had alternative plans to invade Iraq if Britain decided not to take part in military actions, adding: "To the extent they [Britain] are not able to participate, there are works around and they would not be involved".[2] In the UK, the Prime Minister was facing significant opposition from within the Labour Party and from the general public, with demonstrations in London in mid-February 2003 drawing an estimated

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(and record) one million people. These political problems created a febrile atmosphere in the run-up to a potential operation (and gave US military planners a task that, to say the least, was extremely challenging). Nevertheless, it was widely recognised that the US would attract greater international legitimacy if it could form a coalition, particularly if this could be garnered under UN auspices.[3] Also, the UK military contribution on the table, though small in relative numbers, provided some capabilities that were particularly valuable and included key top-up forces in areas where the US was stretched.[4] Going-it-alone was certainly not the preferred course for the US.[5]

Of course, Operation IRAQI FREEDOM was ultimately conducted as a coalition operation, with troops from the UK and Australia in combat alongside the US military. But no UN mandate was forthcoming. In the aftermath of combat operations, military commentators lined up to analyse the operation, its perceived successes and failures, and the lessons that could be learnt for the future (not least in the context of the operation as a coalition enterprise). As the British Chief of the Defence Staff (CDS) said, "As an example of a coalition operation in modern times, it [the operation in Iraq] has just about everything for the analysts to scrutinise and the arm-chair generals to comment about".[6] The aim of this analysis is to identify the issues and challenges that coalition operations presented during Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Phase 3 and extrapolate from these the wider lessons which we need to identify if we are to move forward in order to prepare ourselves for future coalition operations. But firstly, five caveats. I intend to concentrate on the UK/US relationship, despite the fact that there was also a considerable Australian presence of around 2,000 personnel, comprising elements such as special forces, commando units, FA/18s, frigates and a diving team, as well as a national headquarters similar to, though smaller than, the UK National Contingent Headquarters (NCHQ) at Camp As Saliyah in Qatar (alongside CENTCOM Forward). The Australians will have their own perspective, although they may well have similar observations on the challenges of participation in this coalition endeavour. Indeed, there were many more layers of complexity to the 'coalition' context of this operation, given the dozens of other nations that were involved in some way (whether in providing overflight rights, basing rights or logistic support).[7] Secondly, in order to address the subject holistically, I will look at the operation from the Joint perspective. But, where possible, I will tease out some air-specific issues and examples, and later consider the evolving USAF/RAF relationship in the aftermath of IRAQI FREEDOM. Thirdly, I will focus specifically on lessons from Phase 3 (the combat phase that culminated in the overthrow of Saddam Hussein's regime — 'the conventional combat portion'[8]). At the time of writing, it is plain that Phase 4 — still ongoing — has many further lessons for us, but, nevertheless, there is still much to be gained by analysing Phase 3, and the preparations for it, as a discrete package. Fourthly, it is also important to acknowledge the implications that the refusal of Turkish support had for the UK experience. Apart from the obvious time-critical challenges of the late decision to abandon possible use of Turkey and the necessary redirection of significant quantities of troops and equipment, the demise of the 'Turkey option' took EUCOM out of the C2 equation. Having both CENTCOM and EUCOM in the operation would have added an extra dimension and an already complex situation would have been even more so. Thus the investigation of coalition operations here, by definition, considers coordination and cooperation with only a single US Command HQ. Finally, it is important, to recognise that "what you see depends on where you sit" (here I quote the UK NCC [9]), and my perspective will no doubt be shaped in part by my experience at the NCHQ.

Why is it important for us to understand and progress our thinking on coalition operations? The conflicts we now face, post Cold War and 9/11, are very different to those for which our senior commanders were trained when they began their service. Now, in the early 21st century, the untethering of states from their cold war allegiances has brought benefits for some, but uncertainty (economically and politically) for many as well. 9/11 was the most violent of the shocks which confirmed the arrival of the era of asymmetric conflict: we now live in a world where asymmetric weapons are increasingly effective, have a potentially huge destructive impact, yet

F-14D Tomcats take on fuel from an A-6E Intruder allowing them to remain on station for extended periods, while enforcing the no-fly zone

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are increasingly accessible to non-state aggressors for use worldwide. And we have also entered an era where wars (for potential coalition partners in the West, at least) are increasingly engagements of choice, ideally fought in coalitions of 'willing' participants. From the UK perspective, the likelihood of 'going it alone' for high intensity combat operations is now remote: we envisage fighting in an alliance of coalition partners which, for larger operations, will invariably be alongside the US. In December 2003, the MoD's White Paper stated that: "The most demanding expeditionary operations, including intervention against state adversaries, can only be plausibly conducted if US forces are engaged, either leading a coalition or in NATO".[10] In this context, the cohesion of a coalition, particularly in the asymmetric environment, will be fundamental to the success of an operation, and a competent enemy will recognise that as our potential Centre of Gravity. Even an opposed, but non-hostile, third party can disrupt a prospective operation by attacking potential fault-lines between different coalition members; in 'wars of choice' there are many obstacles facing a coalition even before they reach the enemy. So, the better our understanding of the dynamics and challenges of coalition operations, the better our preparations for the future. From the perspective of understanding the UK/US military relationship, I would opine that we are at a critical point in our development. Having spent 12 years policing the skies over Iraq, working alongside the US for more than 4,000 days of continuous operations, we now face a period of potentially limited operational contact. Indeed, progress in Iraq may lead to that contact reducing further. Thus we must now identify what work we need to do to prepare for future challenges, particularly as the only certainty is that there will be more.

As just mentioned, the preparation and planning for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM took place against a back-drop of continued coalition enforcement of the Iraqi no-fly zones (mandated under UN Resolution 687) with the USAF and RAF operating alongside each other, both in the Northern and Southern Combined Air Operations Centres (CAOCs) and in the air. Planning, operating and living side-by-side for 12 years ensured a level of integration between the USAF and the RAF that was to prove invaluable. Although UK involvement in planning for a potential Iraqi operation only started in mid 2002, all three services had had staff embedded alongside their US counterparts in US Headquarters since 9/11, and Operation ENDURING FREEDOM had

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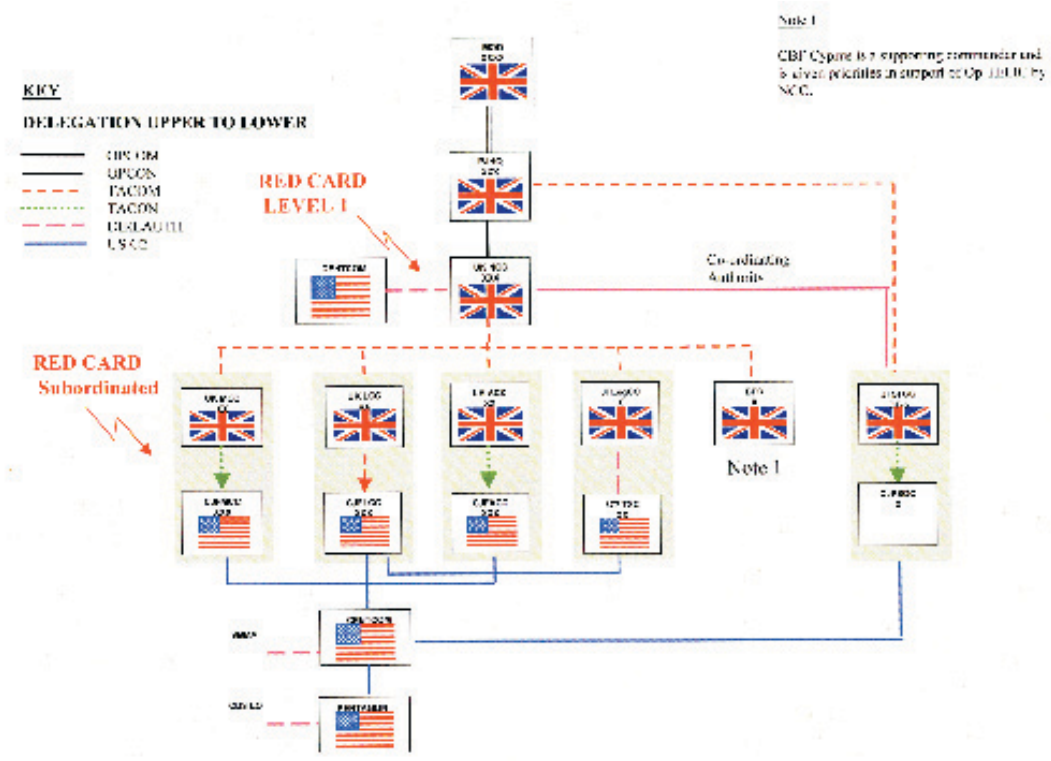
UK Challenger

US and UK personnel planning and operating alongside each other from late 2001. The UK staff at CENTCOM, based at Tampa, was lead by a 3-star initially and then by a 2-star from May 2002. In the autumn of 2002, Air Marshal Burridge[11] was designated National Contingent Commander (NCC) and began strengthening already established relationships at the highest levels. Below him, the UK Contingent Commanders were also working alongside their counterparts. This early planning work allowed the UK visibility of, and increasing involvement and influence in, US planning, with the UK planning teams (the 'embedded' staff [12]) gaining credibility with their US counterparts and superiors, such that they were later to form the core of the UK embedded staff within the deployed US Headquarters.[13] As time moved on, personal relationships developed, trust was established and staffs increasingly appreciated the fundamental concept of shared risk in a coalition operation. Of course, with the political difficulties in the UK in late 2002 (and into the new year of 2003), the embedded UK planning staffs faced the challenge of maintaining momentum in the planning process, against a backdrop of uncertainty about any UK involvement. Established links, through these embedded staff, were essential in keeping UK military planners alongside their counterparts through these difficult times. Widely acknowledged by US and UK commanders as critical to the development of the campaign plans were the exercises and rehearsals that took place in the last few months of preparations. 'Rock drills' and 'chair flys' (depending on the colour of one's cloth), including Exercise INTERNAL LOOK in December 2002, were vital in shaking down planning and C2 issues.

The UK force structure was announced by the Secretary of State in January and February 2003, with the final announcements taking place just a month before the operation eventually began. The UK contribution was to consist of over 100 fixed wing aircraft and 120 helicopters, an army division comprising three Brigades and over 100 Challengers, and an Amphibious Task Group, along with mine clearance vessels, TLAM shooters and a hospital ship. The MoD's First Reflections report stated that "The UK contribution was taken



into the US plan where it could best complement and enhance US capabilities, both political and military".[14] The RAF deployed more than 8,000 personnel with air assets tailored to US requirements (fielding, for example, precision weapons, ISR and C2 platforms, DCA and AR). 'The Plan' had gone through many iterations[15] and as possible conflict drew closer, and with No Fly Zone operations still ongoing, it became apparent that events would have to be synchronised in a number of areas. Here, coalition relationships at the higher military levels were critical, as the commanders tailored and reworked plans to accommodate the shifting realities of the final critical weeks. The prospect of particular enemy actions: use of Western Desert Scuds, potential actions in the Kurdish Autonomous Zone, and the threat of sabotage to the Southern oilfields, coalesced into an imperative to compress the 'shaping' phase to the bare minimum. The integration of the coalition staffs ensured that the coalition moved together 'as one' in these final planning stages.

So, within the context of the coalition, what were the issues and challenges we faced; what worked and what didn't?

First of all, although subject to ongoing debate, I believe coalition military C2 relationships worked well. This diagram shows how C2 was delegated within the UK military and how that aligned with the US military construct. Within the UK, planning and oversight of the operation was led by MoD and the Permanent Joint Headquarters (PJHQ), which jointly form the Defence Crisis Management Organisation. CDS appointed Chief Joint Operations (CJO) at the PJHQ as the Joint Commander, with OPCOM of deployed forces. With some exceptions (such as special forces), OPCON of committed forces was delegated by CJO to the NCC, who in turn sub-delegated TACOM to UK Environmental Contingent Commanders (who could then in turn delegate TACON to their US counterparts).[16] The NCC sat alongside General Franks, CENTCOM Commander, at Camp As-Saliyah in Qatar. At the national and environmental levels in theatre, the UK commanders were responsible for harmonising coalition activity with national political intent and legal requirements, and ensuring the effective employment of UK assets. They also held a national 'red card'. However, the use of that red card was avoided on more than one occasion because the trust that existed at all levels of command allowed informal dialogue to pre-empt any potential formal action. This approach was absolutely pivotal in minimising friction. The way in which the different national contingents integrated into their components was determined

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both by the nature of their environments and by their contributions. Both the UK air and maritime elements were fully integrated into their US contingent; indeed for air, the very nature of the environment demands full integration. The Land environment is somewhat different. From early on, the challenges of integrating UK land forces into a US digitised land formation were recognised. Although a surmountable technological problem (just) it would have been testing. However, the change of plan following Turkey's decision not to grant basing rights meant that the UK land contingent plan changed to having a UK division operating with 1st Marine Expeditionary Force within a discrete geographical area in the south of Iraq, reducing reliance on integrated C2 technological capability.

In terms of linkages between the deployed commander and the UK, the NCC worked through CJO to the Defence Staff, with CJO and the PJHQ acting as a buffer between London and the NCC in theatre, allowing the NCC to concentrate on coalition military issues and his relationships with the US military and his national environmental contingent commanders. If CJO, as Joint Commander, had deployed forward, as had been mooted, the combined tasks of CJO and the NCC (looking up to London, across and up to CENTCOM, and looking after national interests at the Command Headquarters level) would all have been vested in a single individual/location; considering the workload required solely for the NCC to stay alongside General Franks and the CENTCOM battle rhythm, it seems certain that other, vital, linkages would have suffered. During the operation, the NCC was reported in the Daily Telegraph as having made 'the surprising revelation' that he had never spoken to the Prime Minister.[17] "I have never spoken to Tony Blair", he said, "I answer to the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Secretary of State."[18] Journalists may have found this surprising, but the NCC, and indeed the Prime Minister, had no need for direct contact, relying instead on the C2 chains which were already well defined in UK doctrine and with communication routes up the levels of command to the MoD already well-trodden during recent operations. The US military had a different and more fluid construct, with direct communication regularly taking place between CENTCOM and the Defense Department (Donald Rumsfeld and General Franks were in daily direct contact, often via VTC with the NCC alongside General Franks, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the Pentagon made direct calls to the US Component Commanders).[19] The differences between the US and UK C2 constructs, particularly the political-military interface aspect, were debated by the House of Commons Defence Select Committee (HCDC) which, in its Third Report, recommended that ". . . the MOD considers whether the highest levels of British command structures might be made more adaptable so as to be able to operate more closely in parallel with their American counterparts, when UK and US forces are operating together".[20] They expanded by saying "it might be argued that the British system should be able to adapt to deal with the more direct political-military interface practised by the Americans".[21] However, in its response to the HCDC's observations on differing UK/US structures, the government firmly stated: "We do not agree. The Coalition command structures were closely integrated'.[22] In reality, relationships in-theatre were excellent and the NCC was able to provide comprehensive feedback daily to CJO. It is worth noting that our experience with US C2 during Kosovo was very different, with direction to senior US military commanders in-theatre filtering down a more traditional chain (more similar to the UK construct). These differences are driven as much by the personalities involved as by the mission and environment and it is, therefore, likely that the personalities involved will have a significant bearing on future US command relationships. We cannot, obviously, predict the nature of future US administrations and the characteristics that might pertain during future conflicts (or, indeed, UK government working practices which are, perhaps to a lesser extent but

more so than in the past, also personality driven), but our C2 construct is robust and, whilst clearly defined, has proved itself flexible enough to accommodate such nuances.

The UK view that participating in a coalition operation meant sharing the burden in terms of commitment of troops and assets and sharing the responsibility for the operation and sharing the risk, to our forces and to the outcome, formed the central tenet of mutual understanding between the UK and US commanders. Our willingness to commit to training and planning together, and US trust in placing UK military personnel in key positions within the US organisation, also contributed to our strong stance as we, as a coalition (bearing in mind the Centre of Gravity issue), 'crossed the line' together. It was not long before this was put to the test when a US Patriot battery shot down a UK Tornado GR4, with the tragic loss of the crew. Although the ultimate causes of the accident were established later on, it was known almost immediately that a US Patriot had brought down the aircraft. At the National Headquarters in Qatar and in the Air Component Headquarters (ACHQ) in Saudi Arabia, the senior US and UK commanders understood that this incident was an important test of our relationship. Both in the National and Air Headquarters, the US commanders contacted their UK equivalents to offer apologies and condolences. The morning after the shoot-down, at a pre-scheduled interview, the NCC vowed that, following the tragedy, relations with the US were as strong as ever: "A military campaign is probably the most intimate alliance you can implement. We have two nations who share the risks, share the dangers and share the rewards. You develop a bond of trust because you are taking responsibility for each other's lives'.[23] On the same day, General Franks, in an interview with George Pascoe Watson of The Sun was asked about his views on the accident and insisted that any suggestion that friendly-fire incidents would drive the US and the UK apart was misguided, "I disagree in the strongest terms. When there are friendly-fire incidents across coalition boundaries it brings allies closer together'.[24] These were not empty words: in private, the commanders expressed identical views.

One of the first hurdles to face us was the synchronisation of the use of information in the campaign, particularly given the multi-faceted nature of the 'audiences' that we were communicating with.[25] In theatre, the approach of our militaries to the media was a case in point. In the run-up to the operation, coalition staffs worked hard to align our media strategies and define the daily rhythm (with important audiences spread across the world's time zones), but the different national approaches were more difficult to coordinate. For the ACHQ, journalists were banned from Saudi Arabia and so the focus for journalists following the air campaign turned away from there and dispersed to the press centre and bases in Kuwait. At the National Contingent level, there was a Combined Press Information Centre in Qatar (with a conference 'set' described as having "a passing resemblance to the deck of Starship Enterprise" and designed by a Hollywood art director [26]) and the cultural challenges of working side-by-side with our coalition partners and the various media outlets were soon obvious. Even before we 'stood up' in Qatar, the stated concept of 'shock and awe' had sat uncomfortably with the UK's emphasis on the future rebuilding of Iraq.[27] Although the phrase 'shock and awe' was studiously avoided by our US colleagues in theatre[28] , General Franks's first news conference after the conflict commenced referred to a campaign 'characterised by shock', delivery of 'decisive precision shock' and 'the introduction of shock air forces' in his initial preamble.[29] But this was as much due to a cultural, rather than doctrinal, difference in presentation. As Paul Adams (BBC correspondent) put it: "The tall, imposing, jug-eared Texan seemed just the man to inflict a dose of shock and awe on Iraq, while his shorter, bespectacled British counterpart appeared to embody something a little more nuanced." While it was tempting to draw distinctions between the two major coalition partners, 'shock and awe' and 'effects-based warfare' were essentially the same thing. "There are other ways of doing shock and awe than by breaking things," Burridge said'.[30] In any case, as an Air Force Magazine article put it: "It was not the job of the Department of Defense [in the context of 'shock and awe'] to correct expectations generated by others. Indeed, not doing so may

Members of Saddam Hussein's Republican Guard

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have been a form of passive disinformation'.[31] This was, however, the first and only coalition conference in Qatar. While General Franks and his media spokesman, General Brooks, presented to the media, the UK, Australian, Danish and Dutch national commanders stood in attendance on the podium. None was given a speaking part in a conference that lasted well over an hour, and the impression given was not the one that we wanted to project. Nor did it reflect reality, for the NCC had anything but a solely 'walk-on part', and it was decided after this that unilateral media handling was likely to be the better option. No doubt, the differing attitudes of our national press had a great deal to do with the way that we viewed media handling: the US military were certainly surprised at the relatively hostile treatment we received from the UK media[32] , while the patient and sometimes supine attitude of the US press to some fairly poor treatment (in comparison to what we knew our UK press would expect) by the US military media handlers was a source of some surprise to us.[33] Perhaps Paul Adams's description of our differences seems harsh, but it also sums up the perceptions of the press with which both militaries were attempting to grapple: "Reporters desperate for facts swarmed every time a clean-cut, polite American military spokesman ventured into the crowded corridors. But the constraints imposed by 'operational security' or, just as often, a reluctance to speak out of turn, meant we always came away disappointed . . . A small team of British media handlers worked hard to fill the void . . . It was an adult way of doing things, and one that the Americans could not, or would not, emulate".[34] In terms of information, there was

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also an issue of marrying our military objectives for the operation. The published UK government military campaign objectives for the operation cited the prime objective as 'to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction and their associated weapons programmes and means of delivery'.[35] For the US, the prime objective was to 'end the regime of Saddam Hussein'.[36] The US objectives referred to terrorism in their third and fourth objectives, yet the UK referred to terrorism only under 'wider political objectives in support of the military campaign.'[37] The key to marrying these two perspectives under one coalition banner was, of course, our united attitude to Saddam Hussein's regime. As the UK government articulated it: "The obstacle to Iraq's compliance with its disarmament obligations under relevant UNSCRs is the current Iraqi regime . . . it is therefore necessary that the current Iraqi regime be removed from power'.[38] The two perspectives were as one on that aim, but it still required a careful approach by the US and the UK national commands to ensure that that fact was fully understood.

An early (pre-campaign) issue, which has crystallised into a 'lesson-learnt' for coalition operations, was that of basing of assets. The UK and the US agreed that the US would lead in negotiating Host Nation (HN) Support for coalition assets. In the early stages of planning this seemed a pragmatic approach, but as time passed and HN views hardened, it became apparent that, at least from the HN's view, one country's aspiration for HN Support would be considered in isolation from any others, regardless of how the request had been submitted. This may seem an obvious strategy from the HN with hindsight, but at the time a united coalition approach seemed to be the most appropriate course. As it turned out, it probably did neither the US nor the UK any favours. At short notice, the flipside of the coalition equation came into play, with the US's assistance and flexibility enabling our deployment by accommodating our changing plans (due to the HN issue) for air and land basing within their own plan.

Another challenge, which benefited from much thought and application before the campaign started, was the issue of national rules of engagement and delegation given to commanders in theatre. During Kosovo, General Clark had expressed his frustration with laborious coalition approval processes.[39] Both the NCC and the ACC agreed after Operation IRAQI FREEDOM that, for this operation, the final delegations were infinitely more flexible and coherence across the coalition in terms of delegations was critical to UK credibility in a high tempo campaign with an air effort so vast that up to 1700 sorties a day were being launched.[40] Of course, there were occasions when our UK viewpoint on how an 'effect' would be interpreted differed from the US viewpoint. In the case of IRAQI FREEDOM, where the UK saw the potential for disagreement over the national acceptability of a particular course of action, resort to 'Red cards' was not the preferred option and, at the NCHQ level, differences of opinion were routinely resolved through debate and discussion. In fact, the UK was able to offer — and the US was comfortable being offered — British advice even when the UK was not directly involved. As Air Marshal Burridge said in evidence to the HCDC: 'Where I believe the interesting bit occurs — and I think this is where we added considerable value — was in saying, yes, okay, this is an American target, American platform, no British involvement, but actually let me just say how this might look viewed in Paris, Berlin or wherever".[41]

The sharing of information and the interoperability of information systems were among the greatest challenges facing the coalition. Thankfully, the limited extent of the IRAQI FREEDOM coalition made information and intelligence sharing easier than it would have been in a larger coalition. However, the sharing of information is at the centre of the relationship of trust that is needed in a coalition and during IRAQI FREEDOM, the frustration came in translating the trust engendered at the highest levels into sensible information sharing at the lower levels. The issue was not one of releasibility per se: more that each individual in the chain felt beholden to check the releasibility of the information before actioning any requests. The system was therefore slow and cumbersome, rather than responsive and agile. CIS systems were also a problem, with the US operating on their infinitely superior SIPRNET system, which was not releasable to UK eyes

without US supervision, while the UK operated its myriad CIS systems, and had access to CENTRIX; a US CIS system, with AUS/UK access, onto which AUS/UK releasable SIPRNET information could be transferred. However, the process was mandraulic rather than automatic, requiring our US counterparts to find the time (in a high tempo operational environment) to decide on and implement the transfer of information. Again, these challenges tended to be overcome through face-to-face dialogue and the development of good working relationships, although not without costs to efficiency.

So where do our experiences during Phase 3 leave us twenty-two months on? Notwithstanding ongoing events in Iraq, there are some important lessons from IRAQI FREEDOM for the UK and the US, just as there is a recognition that our operational interoperability (both in terms of how we think we fight and how we technically fight) must be maintained or we may suffer for it next time. There are no guarantees, if there is a next time, that we will have as much planning time (even though the political will to allow us to engage in planning, even if future intent is uncertain, can give us crucial influence at the earliest stage possible)[42] and it is almost a given

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RAF Tornado equipped with Stormshadow long-range, stand off air-to-ground cruise missile

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that we will not have just spent 12 years side-by-side in theatre in the run-up to a large scale operation. In fact, recognition that things will not be the same 'next time' is a key lesson in itself.

Importantly, we must offer capabilities which are of utility and influence, and which can fill gaps in and complement US capability. Tactical Recce and STORMSHADOW are good examples from the air contingent of capabilities that the UK alone could offer, while tankers and E-3s are examples of assets that we could offer which were in short supply. If the UK can perform valued tasks that the US requires (and other allies may not be able to field), our influence will be felt: "The significant military contribution the UK is able to make . . . means that we secure an effective place in the political and military decision-making processes".[43] Sharing contentious and dangerous activities, not just those which are 'niche' or in short supply, is another vital way that our military contribution can demonstrate commitment and determine the value in which we are held (and the influence which we can bring to bear).

We must also recognise the value that sensible delegations had in the trust that the US put in the UK. These delegations allowed us to participate in some high importance time critical targeting decisions and ensured that we were included fully in decision-making. The marriage of political ends is a similarly critical but extremely sensitive area of coalition cooperation, and we will always need to be alive to the need to ensure that coalition members' political ends (if different or differently prioritised) are understood, enmeshed and met. These political coalition issues will always be sensitive and challenging to planners, but they are critical to the successful execution of a coalition operation.

Most pressingly important to the UK and the US is the challenge of replacing the operational linkages that already existed (particularly between our Navies and Air Forces) as a result of the 12 years of coalition work leading up to IRAQI FREEDOM. We need to stay alongside each other by training and exercising together, developing doctrinally together and wargaming as a coalition. From the RAF's and the USAF's perspective, this has been a priority since Phase 3 of IRAQI FREEDOM finished. The two forces have established an Engagement Initiative designed as a forum to take forward work on interoperability issues under the RAF Chief of the Air Staff and the USAF Chief to ensure that we are working and training together to prepare for the future. Some of this is practical — ensuring that our exchange programmes develop over time and ensuring that we maximise opportunities to exercise together — and some is technical — and in this area equipment procurement and development is central. As CDS outlined: "Whilst there are real opportunities for interoperability as forces modernise, there is equally the risk that this very modernisation could undermine the unity of effort in any coalition. The technological gap between digitised and analogue contingents will impact severely on the principal advantage of digitisation — that of a force's ability to rely on tempo as a major ingredient of combat power — and in warfighting this could impact to a point where two elements become operationally irreconcilable."[44] In the USAF, 'Plug and Play' is becoming (quite understandably) the mantra. Commanders are not interested in new equipment that cannot integrate into the battlespace and, importantly, cannot talk without 'a man in the loop' to the next piece of equipment. As Lieutenant General Keys[45] states: "Whatever is on the inside of your widget or gadget can be proprietary, but what comes out of the little plug in the front or back of it must speak the language of Airmen, and must work with my other equipment or systems without any third party translation or integrators needed. This is the rule for the 21st century USAF and if you can't abide by it . . . we won't buy it."[46] The RAF has to maximise its presence alongside the USAF as they develop interoperability priorities and policies. It is also recognised by the USAF/RAF initiative that the cultural and intellectual aspects of fighting together are fundamental to progress. As well as interaction at senior levels (in meetings, at conferences, at war games etc), it is important to develop closer links further down the chain of command. There are several initiatives now in their developmental stages that aim — across the ranks — to develop our understanding of each other's cultural ways

of doing business and grow a new generation of airmen who see their US counterparts as natural and familiar partners.[47] This approach should compliment our commitment to the policy of embedding UK staff in US Command staff for future operations — a policy that will remain absolutely key to successful cooperation in the future.

We — the US and UK militaries — left the end of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM Phase 3 having worked successfully as a coalition and having faced practical challenges along the way. We can see that these were largely overcome through a combination of fortuitous timing (an extended planning period), strong personal relationships, particularly at the senior levels, mutual dependence and burden-sharing (in terms of the UK providing capabilities which were of unique value to the coalition effort and the recognition, on both sides, that this was a journey we would travel together as a coalition 'for better or for worse') and a motivation to find common ground and to engineer solutions to any problems that threatened the coalition's integrity. Most importantly, trust was established at all levels. For the future, whether we consider mindset, doctrine and culture, or equipment, CONOPS and interoperability, it is mutual cooperation and contact that will provide us with the best chance of staying in step. This will allow us to understand what we can offer each other, how we can best move forward together and in which areas we need to concentrate our efforts in order to maintain momentum.

Most importantly, a strong and close professional relationship will be the key as it was for Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. As the MoD concluded in its First Reflections report: "Working in a coalition brings political, diplomatic and military advantages, including the aggregation of capabilities, flexible war-fighting options and the sharing of intelligence and risk . . . At the operational and tactical levels, the planning and conduct of the operation was facilitated by the close professional relationship that has grown up between the UK and the US."[48] We must ensure it is maintained — future coalition operations will depend on it.

Notes

1 E Mac Askill, R Norton-Taylor and J Borger, US may go it alone as Blair is caught in diplomatic deadlock, The Guardian, 12 March 2004.

2 US willing to go it alone, http://www.aljazeerah.info/Newsarchives, 12 March 2003.

3 Cordesman (2003), pp 487-491. Cordesman, Anthony H (2003), The Iraq War: strategy, tactics and military lessons, (Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies)

4 Murray and Scales (2003), p 132. Murray, Williamson and Scales, Robert J (2003), The Iraq War: a military history, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press)

5 General Franks: "I would honestly say to the people of Great Britain, thanks for committing this magnificent UK force to be part of this coalition. It's powerful, it's effective and I'm glad to march forward beside the Brits', George Pascoe Watson, I'm proud to march with Brits says General Tommy Franks", The Sun, 24 March 2003, similar sentiments also witnessed personally in conversation.

6 The Military Challenges in Coalition Operations, CDS address to DSEI Conference, 11 September 2003 at www.deso.mod.uk/archive accessed 29 May 2004.

7 President Bush confirmed on 18 March that more than 35 countries were supporting the coalition, www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2003/03/20030319-17.html, 18 March 2003.

8 Dudman (2004), p. 2. Dudman, Robert S. (2004), The Three-Week War, Air Force Magazine, March 2004, p 2.

9 Air Marshal Burridge: "I should preface all my remarks with 'What you see depends on where you sit'", Oral Evidence to HCDC, 11 June 2003, Q. 225.

10 Delivering Security in a Changing World: Defence White Paper (2003), para 3.5.

11 Now Air Chief Marshal, Commander-in-Chief, Strike Command.

12 Air Marshal Burridge: "[The UK embedded staff] were members of General Franks's staff, so instead of an American officer doing a particular job, there would be a British officer. That gave us linkage and connectivity between our two headquarters", Oral Evidence to HCDC, 11 June 2003, Q. 217.

13 ". . . we were able to work closely with the US and influence the campaign from initial planning to execution through high-level political contacts . . . as well as by the presence of a significant number of embedded UK officers in key US headquarters." Operations in Iraq: First Reflections (2003), para 6.2.

14 ibid, p 19.

15 "Too many to list!" as General Moseley commented, General T M Moseley speech to Royal Air Force Air Power Conference, 11 May 04.

16 Air Marshal Burridge: '"I sat below [CJO] and I had operational control, so I was given the tasks and the forces and then I just had to match them into the American plan. Tactical command, in other words executing the individual tasks, was held by the UK 2* officers who were contingent commanders

within each environment, air, land, maritime. They handed tactical control to their opposite number who was in all cases a 3* American, who would actually be the person who owned that part of the plan", Oral Evidence to HCDC, 11 June 2003, Q. 220.
17 N Tweedie and M Smith, "There's no hiding place, say Allied military chiefs", The Telegraph, 15 March 03.
18 id.
19 General T M Moseley speech to Royal Air Force Air Power Conference, 11 May 04.
20 Lessons of Iraq — Third Report of Session 2003-04 (2004), para. 84.
21 Ibid.
22 First Special Report: Lessons of Iraq — Government Response to the Committee's Third Report of Session 2003-04 (2004), para 25.
23 Witnessed personally during television interviews with the NCC, 23 March 2004; subsequently widely quoted.
24 George Pascoe Watson, "I'm proud to march with Brits says General Tommy Franks", The Sun, 24 March 2003.
25 Not just the UK and the US, but the Arab Street, other nations, the Iraqi people and, of course, the Iraqi regime.
26 Iraq War: Franks enters the fray of 'Hollywood' briefing room, Birmingham Post, 24 March 2003.
27 Harlan K Ullman, principal architect of the 'Shock and Awe' concept said: "The phrase [Shock and Awe] as used by the Pentagon now, has not been helpful — it has created a doomsday approach — the idea of terrorizing everyone. In fact, that's not the approach. The British have a much better phrase for it: effects-based operations", Correll (2003), p 55. Correll, John T. (2003), What happened to Shock and Awe, Air Force Magazine, November 2003, pp 52-57.
28 "The Department of Defense did not officially or explicitly endorse Shock and Awe, but traces of it could be discerned in statements by top leaders", ibid, p 52.
29 CENTCOM Press Briefing at www.centcom.mil/CENTCOMNews/news_release.asp?NewsRelease=20030344.txt, 22 March 2003.
30 Adams (2003), pp. 106-8. Adams, Paul (2003), Shock and Awe — an Inevitable Victory, in Potter, S, ed, The Battle for Iraq: BBC News Correspondents on the War Against Saddam and a New World Agenda, (London: BBC Worldwide Limited)
31 Correll, op cit, p 57.
32 At a CENTCOM press conference, after another aggressive question from a BBC reporter, General Franks commented "Boy, there's a lot of you BBC guys" (witnessed personally on 23 March 2003).
33 Adams, op cit, pp 106-8.
34 Adams, op cit, p110.
35 Iraq: the military campaign objectives at http://www.number-10.gov.uk 17 March 2003 (visited 30 May 2004).
36 CENTCOM Press Briefing at www.centcom.mil/CENTCOMNews/news_release.asp?NewsRelease=20030344.txt, 22 March 2003.
37 Iraq: the military campaign objectives at http://www.number-10.gov.uk (visited 30 May 2004).
38 id.
39 "A brief assessment of the political-military interactions that took place during Operation Allied Force shows an existing 'delta' between the technologically inspired greater operational speed capabilities that were offered and used by NATO and the tortuously slow political decision-making mechanisms of the North Atlantic Council . . . In consequence, General Clarke was unable to unleash more sophisticated capabilities and thereby obtain a greater degree of operational speed", Young (2003), p 2.
40 Air Marshal Torpy, UK Air Contingent Commander: "What was different was that we were given greater delegation on this occasion because we knew that the tempo of the operation would demand decisions to be taken quickly and I could not go right the way back through the process, back to the PJHQ and MOD, which we could do when we had the luxury of time for our southern no-fly zone operations", Oral Evidence to HCDC, 5 November 2003, Q 1256.
41 Air Marshal Burridge, Oral Evidence to HCDC, 11 June 2003, Q. 251.
42 "Come early and a nation can influence the plan as we did with CENTCOM albeit with no commitment to military action. Come late, and the plan is in concrete", ACM Burridge address to DSEI Conference, 11 Sep 03 at www.deso.mod.uk/archive accessed 29 May 2004.
43 Delivering Security in a Changing World: Defence White Paper, op cit, p 8.
44 The Military Challenges in Coalition Operations, CDS address to DSEI Conference, 11 Sep 03 at www.deso.mod.uk/archive accessed 29 May 2004.
45 Deputy Chief of Staff, Air and Space Operations, USAF.
46 Lieutenant General Keys quote, 23 Jun 2004.
47 Cultural visits, mini-exchange tours and an overhaul of the exchange programme are just some of the projects established under USAF/RAF Engagement.
48 Operations in Iraq: First Reflections (2003), para 7.