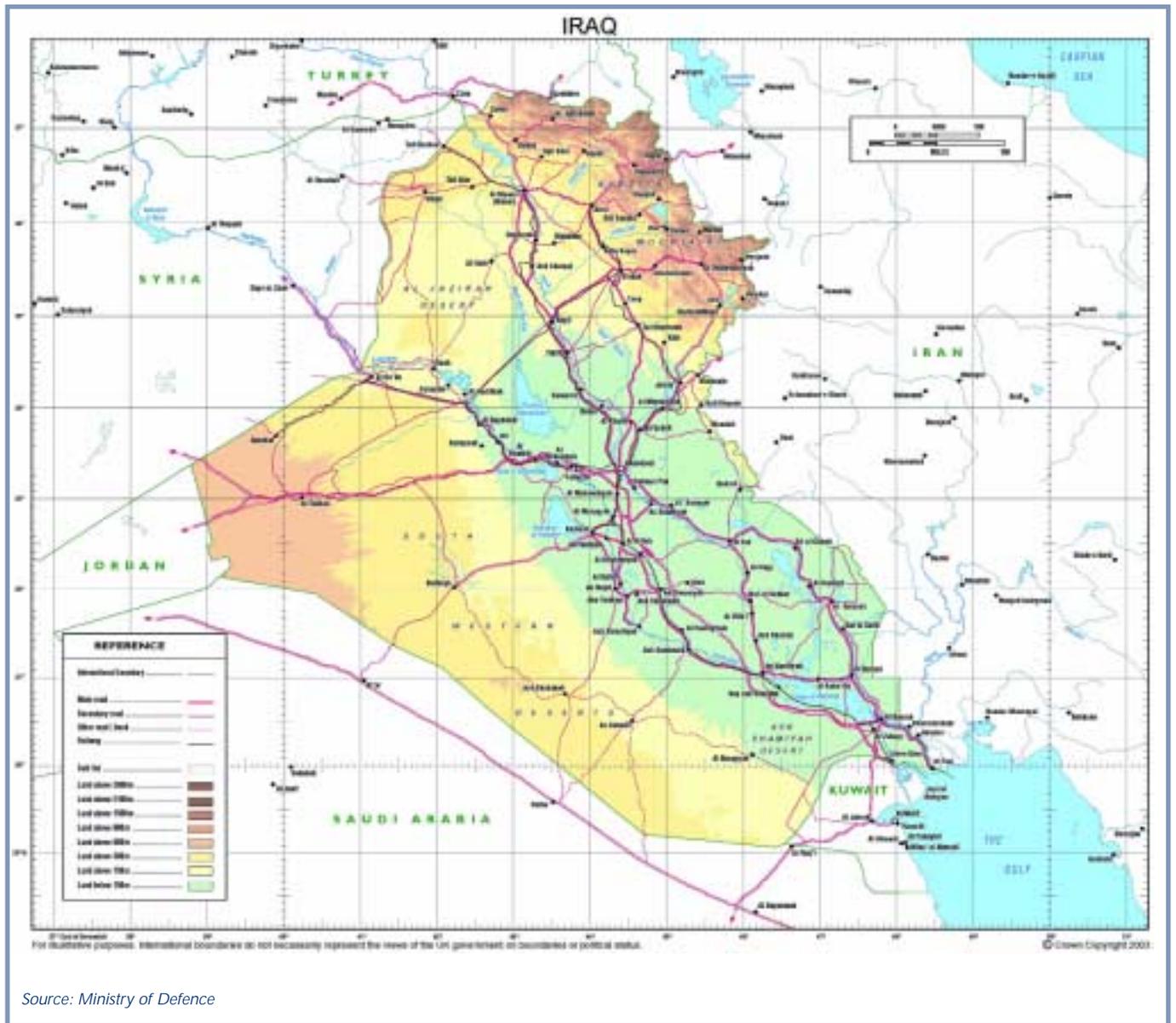


Ministry of Defence
Operation TELIC - United Kingdom Military Operations in Iraq



REPORT BY THE COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL
HC 60 Session 2003-2004: 11 December 2003



Source: Ministry of Defence

executive summary

- 1 Operation TELIC¹ was the United Kingdom's contribution to the Coalition effort in Spring 2003 to create the conditions in which Iraq would disarm in accordance with its obligations under United Nations Security Council Resolutions and remain so disarmed in the long term. Within this overall objective, two key tasks were to remove Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist regime and to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction and their associated programmes and means of delivery. It was the United Kingdom's largest military operation since the 1990-91 Gulf War. The Operation involved the deployment of significant military capabilities from all three armed services including some 46,000 personnel, 19 warships, 14 Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessels, 15,000 vehicles, 115 fixed-wing aircraft and nearly 100 helicopters. In addition it was supported, in the United Kingdom and elsewhere, by large numbers from the Services, civilians and contractors.
- 2 The Operation took place against a background of concurrent operations and commitments, such as the continuing obligations in the Balkans, Sierra Leone, Afghanistan and Northern Ireland and the fire-fighters' strike. The Royal Air Force was also already over-flying northern and southern Iraq as part of the effort to enforce no-fly zones. In addition, the Royal Navy had maintained a continuous presence in the Gulf region enforcing United Nations sanctions against Iraq since 1991.



- 3 The Operation was preceded, in 2001, by Exercise Saif Sareea II in Oman which provided valuable experience of operating in the Gulf region. The National Audit Office and the House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts both issued reports on the Exercise². This examination follows on from those reports. It covers the deployment and combat phases of Operation TELIC and the initial transition from conflict to post-conflict. Our methodology is at Appendix A.

¹ For the purposes of our report, 'Operation TELIC' refers to the deployment, warfighting and initial transition to peace phases of United Kingdom operations in Iraq. It is recognised that the main Peace Support phase of the Operation is still ongoing.

² Report by the Comptroller and Auditor General, HC 1097 Session 2001-02. 6th Report of the Committee of Public Accounts, Session 2002-03.

- 4 *We found that Operation TELIC was a significant military success, particularly in the deployment and combat phases, and the Ministry of Defence (the Department) has identified lessons that could reduce the risks associated with future operations. Planning for the Operation was responsive and flexible, reacting quickly when it was decided to enter the main United Kingdom force through southern Iraq rather than the north. A large and capable force was deployed quickly to the Gulf and within four weeks of the combat phase starting the Ba'athist regime fell. Overall, United Kingdom personnel and their equipment performed impressively. There are, however, important lessons for future operations, mostly about the need to review what our forces should be ready to do at short notice, ensuring that frontline forces receive appropriate levels of equipment and supplies and in managing the transition from conflict to the post-conflict phase.*

Operation TELIC was a significant military success

- 5 United Kingdom and Coalition forces had achieved nearly all their military objectives including the removal of the Saddam Hussein regime and the securing of key infrastructure within four weeks of crossing into Iraq from Kuwait. The major exception was that no weapons of mass destruction were located. Success was achieved with few United Kingdom combat or Iraqi civilian casualties due in part to stringent targeting criteria and the use of precision weapons. The coordinated focus of Coalition combat power led to the regular Iraqi forces having, in the main, little will to fight in a concerted fashion. This represents a very considerable military success.

Deploying the force into theatre quickly was a major achievement but gaps in capability had to be filled urgently

- 6 Within 10 weeks, around half the time it took for the 1990-91 Gulf War, the large United Kingdom force was deployed some 3,400 miles into an austere environment, and prepared for warfighting. This was a major achievement given that some elements of the force were required to be ready to deploy more quickly than planning assumptions envisaged. There were, however, some gaps in capability. Existing operational stock levels were, in many instances, not



sufficient for readiness and sustainability. The rapid deployment highlighted where the Department had made a judgement that it would have the time and ability to build up operational stocks in advance of deployment. Examples include Nuclear, Biological and Chemical warfare protection equipment, spare parts for tanks and armoured vehicles, medical supplies, helicopter spares, ammunition, particularly air munitions, and desert combat clothing and boots.

- 7 Substantial efforts were made to rectify shortfalls and to enhance capability. A number of equipments were urgently upgraded, for example 69 tonnes of combat identification equipment was fitted to over 1,800 vehicles. Some equipment not deployed to the Gulf was 'cannibalised' for spares. Urgent purchases were made of a range of supplies such as desert clothing. Although key equipment was largely modified or supplied on time, in some cases this was completed within 48 hours of the beginning of hostilities. For a few equipments, training time and the supply of ancillary equipment was curtailed.
- 8 Clearly it is costly to hold personnel at high readiness or to hold high levels of operational stocks. For any required level of readiness, a balance has to be struck between having people and equipment ready to go immediately and making good shortfalls in the time available. For Operation TELIC, forces were stretched to make good gaps in the much shorter time available than was expected. This raises questions about the link between current planning assumptions and holdings of operational stocks and whether the balance between stocks on shelves and 'just-in time deliveries' was drawn in the right place.

The huge logistic effort was fundamental to the success of the Operation, but improvements need to be made to ensure effective delivery of supplies to the frontline

- 9 The logistic effort for the Operation was huge and key to success. It took 78 ships and 360 aircraft sorties to transport the personnel, equipment and supplies. Over 9,100 ISO containers were used. Once in-theatre, the forces had to be supported for example, 32,000 personnel were accommodated, 6,500 vehicles were repainted, 194 urgent upgrades to equipment were made, accepted and fielded and a training programme was supported.



- 10** Overall the logistic effort was successful and key equipments, for example the Challenger 2 tank which had experienced difficulties during Exercise Saif Sareea II performed well. Some key shortfalls and lessons were, however, identified. Many arose because of a combination of not having enough operational stock on shelves, enough time to make good the shortfalls and difficulties in ensuring supplies were delivered. In particular, the means of tracking supplies in-theatre was largely ineffective, manpower-intensive and swamped by the sheer volume of supplies. The whereabouts of some key equipment and supplies was unknown and therefore arrangements could not be made to get it to the people who needed it. This led to shortages, loss of confidence in the supply chain and inefficiency as personnel searched for items they had ordered or ordered duplicates urgently.

Arrangements are in place for the post-warfighting stage of the Operation

- 11** It is too early for us to complete a full assessment of the transition to the post-conflict phase. Our initial findings are that our forces were very expert at making an immediate transition from warfighting to peacekeeping. And during our visit to Iraq we saw that considerable efforts were being made to get infrastructure running. A key issue emerging, however, is that, on a United Kingdom Government wide basis, the nature and size of the post-conflict task was extremely difficult both to predict and to plan for. There were gaps in both the coordination of the planning and in the capability to do more in the short and medium term than patch up the existing inadequate infrastructure.

The Department has a comprehensive process for identifying lessons

- 12** The Department has a comprehensive process for identifying lessons emerging from operations and exercises. The Department published in July its 'First Reflections' on the Operation and is due to publish a full assessment in December 2003. In addition, the Vice Chief of the Defence Staff commissioned four special reviews to examine issues emerging from Operation TELIC on the logistics process, consignment tracking, combat identification and Nuclear, Biological and Chemical Warfare. Such a comprehensive process of identifying lessons is even more essential now that the operational tempo requires lessons to be implemented faster.
- 13** Some lessons may not have wider applicability, and the Department may not implement other lessons immediately for reasons such as affordability, prioritisation or technical difficulties.

Recommendations

The Department should review its readiness assumptions and should develop procedures to identify the levels of stocks, or industrial surge arrangements, required to support approved levels of readiness.

The Department should improve management of logistics to reduce risks, in particular by introducing the means of tracking the distribution of materiel once it has arrived in-theatre.

The Department should work alongside Other Government Departments and Non-Governmental Organisations to put in place arrangements to ensure that the post-warfighting phase is well planned.

The Department should review its process for implementing lessons learned to ensure that, subject to issues such as affordability, technical feasibility or other priorities, lessons are implemented as quickly as possible and that warfighting lessons do not unjustifiably slip down the list of priorities during peacetime.