

British Chief Police Investigator in Basra dies under mysterious circumstances

He was responsible for the investigation into the two Elite SAS men disguised as Arab "terrorists"

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Global Research, October 17, 2005
17 October 2005

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

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

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Captain Ken Masters, British chief police investigator in Basra died under mysterious circumstances. The cause of death was not mentioned. According to a Ministry of Defense spokesman, his death was "not due to hostile action" nor to natural causes.

Ken Masters was Commanding Officer of the Special Investigation Branch of the Royal Military Police. He was "responsible for the investigation of all in-theatre serious incidents, plus investigations conducted by the General Police Duties element of the Theatre Investigation Group." (Statement of Britain's Ministry of Defense, 16 Oct 2005).

In this capacity, Captain Masters was responsible for investigating the circumstances of the arrest of two undercover elite SAS men, wearing Arab clothing, by Iraqi police in Basra. on September 19 (London Times (17 Oct 2005)..

"The Ministry of Defence refused to reveal details about his [Masters] work but it is believed he was involved in the inquiry into the dramatic rescue of two SAS soldiers held in a prison in Basra." (Daily Mail, 16 Oct 2005)

The two British undercover "soldiers", who were driving a car loaded with weapons and ammunition, were subsequently "rescued" by British forces, in a major military assault on the building where they were being detained:

"British forces used up to 10 tanks " supported by helicopters " to smash through the walls of the jail and free the two British servicemen."

The incident, which resulted in numerous civilian and police casualties has caused political embarrassment.

Several media reports and eyewitness accounts suggested that the SAS operatives were disguised as Al Qaeda "terrorists" and were planning to set off the bombs in Basra's central square during a a major religious event.

On the 14th of October, Britain formally apologized to Iraq and confirmed that it "will pay compensation for injuries and damage caused during the storming by the army of a police station in Basra in the operation to release two SAS soldiers" (The Scotsman, 15 Oct 2005). In the British raid on the prison, 7 Iraqis were killed and 43 were injured .(The Times, op cit)

“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.” (ibid)

Captain Ken Masters died in Basra on the 15th. According to the MoD “the circumstances [of his death] were not regarded as suspicious.”

The reports casually suggested that Masters might have been suffering from “stress”, which could have driven him to commit suicide. In the words of a Defense analyst quoted by the BBC:.

“Capt Masters was part of quite a small outfit and his job would have been quite stressful. It’s quite an onerous job..... I think, [there is] quite a lot of stress involved” (BBC, 16 October 2005).

The Daily Mail (17 Oct 2005), however, tends to dismiss the suicide thesis “Little is known of his private life and it is said to be unlikely that the pressures of work would have led him to commit suicide.”

British statements concerning the “rescue operation”

The attack on the 19th of September to “rescue” the two SAS men was launched under the command of Brig John Lorimer. In a statement, Lorimer said that the purpose of the raid was to ensure the safety of the two SAS men: .

“... I had good reason to believe that the lives of the two soldiers were at risk and troops were sent to the area of Basra near the police station to help ensure their safety. ... “Later in the day, however, I became more concerned about the safety of the two soldiers after we received information that they had been handed over to militia elements. As a result I took the difficult decision to order entry to the Jamiat police station. By taking this action we were able to confirm that the soldiers were no longer being held by the IPS. An operation was then mounted to rescue them from a house in Basra.”

(The Times, 20 Oct 2005 <http://www.timesonline.co.uk/article/0,,7374-1788850,00.html>)

Ironically, Brig Lorimer’s account was challenged by the US appointed interim government. Iraqi interior minister Baqir Solagh Jabr, in an interview with the BBC “denied that the Iraqi police had handed over the SAS men to the local militias, as Brigadier Lorimer had stated....’That is not right, totally not right,’ he said. He accused Brigadier Lorimer of reacting to ‘rumour’ when he ordered his men to storm the police station and said that the building where the SAS men had been found was actually part of the police station” (The Independent, 12 Oct 2005).

In a subsequent declaration, Lorimer said that the police in Basra were involved in terrorism, and were being supported by Iran (This alleged link to Iran is now denied by British Defense officials).

Lorimer also said that that the two arrested undercover SAS men had been investigating torture and abuse within the prison: The SAS men had been “given the task of trying to establish who was behind the reign of terror at the jail” (quoted in the Daily Telegraph, 16

Oct 2005). According to Lorimer the prison was a “very nasty place”. (Ibid)

The Investigation

The citizens of Basra witnessed the arrest. Civilians were killed and injured when British forces under the command of Brig Lorimer led the military assault on the prison. Al Jazeera reported the circumstances of the arrest in an interview with Fattah al-Shaykh, member of the Iraqi National Assembly:

If you really want to look for truth, then we should resort to the Iraqi justice away from the British provocations against the sons of Basra, particularly what happened today when the sons of Basra caught two non-Iraqis, who seem to be Britons and were in a car of the Cressida type. It was a booby-trapped car laden with ammunition and was meant to explode in the centre of the city of Basra in the popular market. However, the sons of the city of Basra arrested them. They [the two non-Iraqis] then fired at the people there and killed some of them. The two arrested persons are now at the Intelligence Department in Basra, and they were held by the National Guard force, but the British occupation forces are still surrounding this department in an attempt to absolve them of the crime. (Al Jazeera TV 20 Sept 2005).

Nobody in Basra believes that the two arrested SAS men were “working undercover against militants linked to Iran”:

“The Iraqi police stopped a car with two foreigners dressed as Arabs, and full of weapons and explosives,” he said. “There have been terrorist attacks and explosions in Basra – of course the police wanted to investigate.”.... Mr Hakim dismissed as “propaganda” reports that the soldiers were working undercover against militants linked to Iran. Officials in Basra have called for an espionage trial for the two in an Iraqi court. British soldiers’ legal immunity “does not apply when they are out of uniform”, Mr Hakim said. (Mr. Hakim is a leading official in Iraq’s largest Shia Muslim party, quoted in the Financial Times, 29 Sept 2005)

Was the British military blocking Captain Masters police investigation?

There were apparent disagreements between British military commanding officers and the military police officials dispatched to the war theater in charge of investigating the actions and behavior of military personnel. (The Independent 17 Oct 2005).

Was pressure put to bear on Captain Masters by the Ministry of Defense? According to Michael Keefer, the British Army led by Brig Lorimer was determined

“to remove these men from any danger of interrogation by their own supposed allies in the government the British are propping up—even when their rescue entailed the destruction of an Iraqi prison and the release of a large number of prisoners, gun-battles with Iraqi police and with Al-Sadr’s Mahdi Army militia, a large popular mobilization against the British occupying force, and a subsequent withdrawal of any cooperation on the part of the regional government—tends, if anything, to support the view that this episode involved something much darker and more serious than a mere flare-up of bad tempers at a check-point.”

(See

Michael

Keefer,

<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=viewArticle&code=KEE20050925&articleId=994>)

Captain Ken Masters had a mandate to cooperate in his investigations, with the civilian Iraqi authorities. As part of his mandate he was to investigate “into allegations that British soldiers killed or mistreated Iraqi civilians”. Specifically in this case, the inquiry pertained to the circumstances of the British assault on the prison on 19 September. The press reports and official statements suggest that the assault on the prison was authorized by the Ministry of Defense.

General Sir Michael Jackson, Chief of the General Staff was in Basra a few days prior to Captain Masters untimely death to deal explicitly with the matter.

While in Basra, he no doubt also had meetings with both Brig Lorimer and Captain Masters. General Jackson has upheld the rescue of the elite SAS men:

“Let me make it clear that it was important to retrieve those two soldiers.”
(quoted in the Times, 12 Oct 2005)

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