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Memo: don't rely on the Brits during a battle

Never mind our colonial past. Confidence in the Armed Forces is the biggest threat to the special relationship

Rachel Sylvester



Tony Blair used to say that the British voters wanted him to have a *Love Actually* moment — and tell the President of the United States to get lost, as the Prime Minister played by Hugh Grant does in the film. As Barack Obama prepares to move into the White House, Gordon Brown is more likely to find himself in a *Mamma Mia!* situation. He is one of several people competing to be the political equivalent of the father of the bride.

Along with Nicolas Sarkozy (Piers Brosnan) and Angela Merkel (Colin Firth) the Prime Minister is begging the most popular man on the planet: take a chance on me. In his new year message, he promised to spend money money money on an economic "coalition for change" with Mr Obama. Now he is racing to be the first leader to visit the president in Washington; to the tune *I Have a Dream*, he is preparing to woo Barack with policy papers at the G20 summit in London this April.

Like Meryl Streep's former lovers

on the Greek island, however, Mr Brown will end up having to share Mr Obama. The inauguration of a president who is adored by the British public could ironically spell the end of the special relationship between the UK and the US. Just as the voters in this country decide that it is time to get up close and personal with America, so the Yanks are losing their passion for the Brits. Just as the Prime Minister decides it is time to stand shoulder to shoulder with the US president, so he may find the cold shoulder turned on him.

This is partly but not entirely about Mr Obama. Certainly, the President-elect will be the least Anglophile American leader in living memory. Unlike Bill Clinton, who

was educated at Oxford, or George Bush, who kept a bust of Winston Churchill in the Oval Office, Mr Obama has no innate affection for this country — in fact, his grandfather was imprisoned and tortured by British colonialists in Kenya.

When he was looking for a symbolic place from which to address Europe — and the world — he chose not Trafalgar Square but the Brandenburg Gate. It was a deliberate attempt to distance himself from the Bush Administration — by going straight to the heart of what Donald Rumsfeld once called "old Europe". If he wants to prove his ability to build new alliances, he will

not start in this country. "The UK is part of the Bush baggage because of Iraq," says a senior Foreign Office source. "Obama is not going to be emotional about the transatlantic alliance. He's a free-thinking politician, driven by science and facts. The UK and Europe look less significant than Asia and Latin America and even over here Europe seems a better focus than the UK."

The British position has not been helped by Sir Nigel Sheinwald, the Ambassador to Washington, a career

Senior military figures are shocked at feedback that arrived last month

diplomat educated at Oxford, whose pin-striped demeanour does not fit easily with the open-necked attitude of the Obama camp. A memo, leaked last year, in which our man in DC described the President-elect as "aloof", "insensitive" and lacking a track record did not go down well with a politician who already suspected the British of having a superiority complex.

There will, of course, be common ground between Mr Brown and Mr Obama on the recession — both men are strong advocates of a global fiscal stimulus. But the Prime Minister's vision of himself as sage

adviser, offering a helping hand to

the youthful novice, is likely to end up as the audacity of hope. The President-elect's maxim about the challenges being big, but politics being small (which Mr Brown likes to quote) can be transposed on to the transatlantic relationship: rarely has politics in this country seemed so tiny, compared with what is going on in the United States.

Perhaps most important of all, the military alliance between Britain and America — which has cemented the political alliance since the First World War — is beginning to crack. I am told that a report circulating at the highest level in the Ministry of Defence concludes that there are now serious doubts in Washington about the effectiveness of the British Armed Forces. Senior military figures are said to have been surprised, and shocked, by feedback that arrived in Whitehall last month. Described as "highly sensitive", it raised questions about the worth of the UK contribution to US-led operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. "It showed that the Americans don't value us much," one source told me. "Britain's military ability is no longer rated as highly as we thought it was."

This is not a last gasp by the outgoing Bush administration. Robert Gates, the US Defence Secretary, who has been asked to remain in his job by Mr Obama, is one of those

said to have reservations about the British military contribution.

The message has filtered across to the Foreign Office, too. At a diplomatic as well as a military level, concerns have been raised about the quality of British troops and equipment. Too often, the Americans complain, they have had to ride to the rescue of the Brits, rather than being able to rely on them as equal partners. There are question marks in Washington about Britain's political commitment to military engagement: Mr Brown will not be forgiven if he fails to send substantial numbers of troops to support an Obama surge in Afghanistan.

"The US generals think the Brits need to be taken down a peg or two

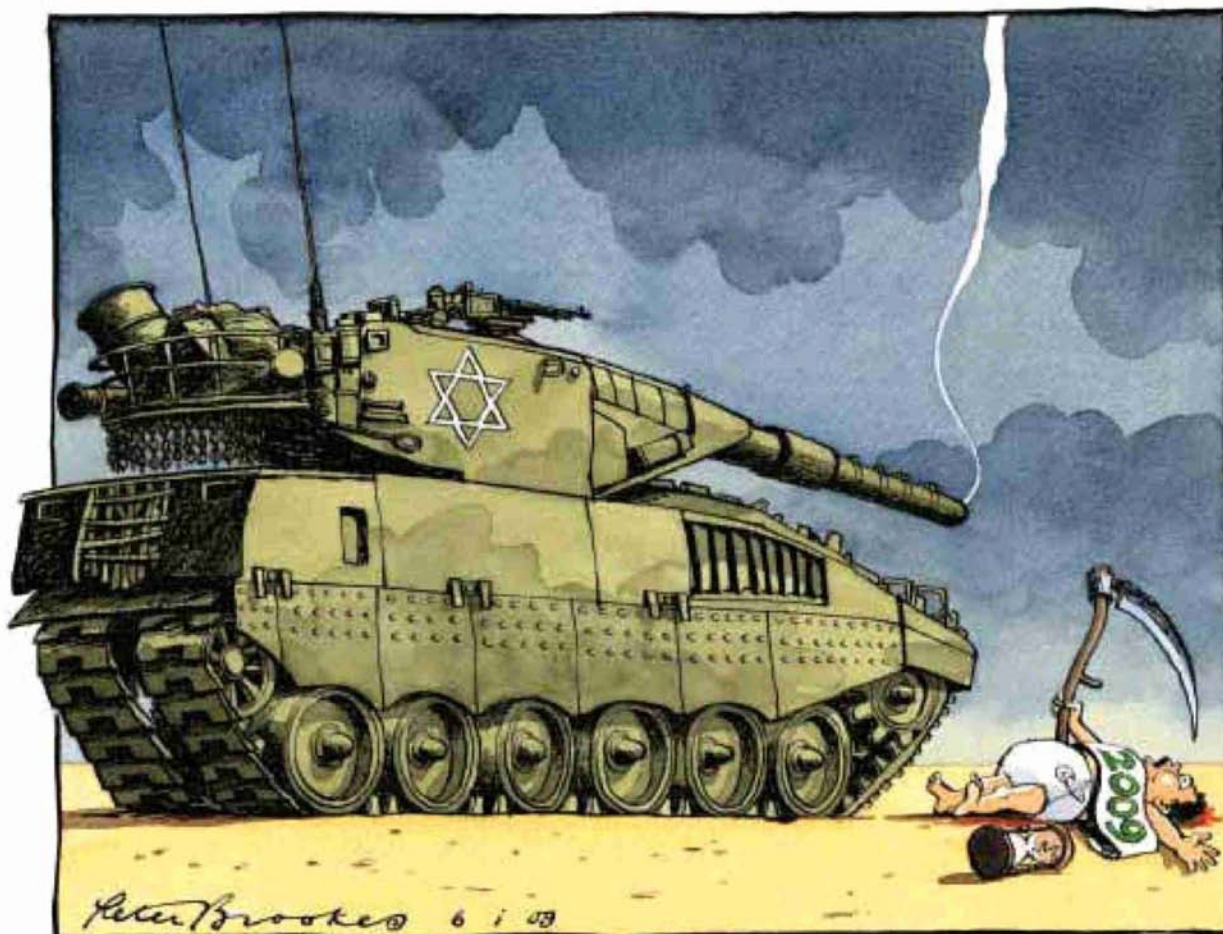
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— that we have not performed well in Basra and Helmand province — and that has trickled up to the Pentagon,” says a Foreign Office insider. “It’s not terminal but it’s an important warning to us that if we are going to trade on our military partnership we are going to have to raise our game.”

Mr Obama won power promising change. Mr Brown wants nothing more than to bask in the reflected glory of that. But it looks as if the Anglo-American alliance will be one of the first targets for change. One minister says the “specialness” in the special relationship will be diluted. It may not survive at all.

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Red Flag



A missive arrived to me from a well-placed British officer. I know this officer well, and respect his abilities. He has been to both Iraq and Afghanistan. In part, the missive said:

“Please have a look at the attached from the UK Times. Regarding the Rachel Sylvester piece, we have not been able to find any such document/memo although it is possible that an e-mail exists somewhere that refers to such a matter – more likely to be a warning not to dick about regarding what extra troops the UK might be able to find for AFG and raise unrealistic US expectations.”

[Rachel Sylvester US doubts about UK military effectiveness 6 Jan 09.pdf](#)

[The Special Relationship Times leader 7 Jan 09.pdf](#)

The words imply that the US-UK relationship is fraying. This is untrue as seen from the foxholes I am constantly in. I have embedded with numerous British units in Iraq and Afghanistan, and have seen combat with all of those units. Maybe five or so. The units included 2 Rifles, 4 Rifles, Queen's Royal Lancers, Duke of Lancaster's, 2 Para, and I believe perhaps a couple more though there was much going on and it's difficult to remember.

What I can say, is that the significant combat I saw with British soldiers made me respect them more with each battle. Yes, it's true their gear needs serious upgrading. The British government needs to spend billions to upgrade the hardware. But when it comes to the soldier, British soldiers are extremely well-trained, courageous and ready for a big firefight at the drop of a hat. Our brothers and sisters are vastly outnumbered at Helmand Province in Afghanistan. I think about them several times a day and am concerned that they might take serious losses this year.

When the question comes up about what Americans think about our closest ally, I ask MANY American soldiers what they think of the British. There are mixed opinions of course, but the bottom line is that American combat veterans greatly respect British soldiers. The British just need better gear. Another well-placed British Army officer recently told me while I was in Afghanistan that the British have plenty of helicopters. I did not respect those words, though I was told by an important American officer that this British officer is very good. “Don't bullshit me, sir,” I replied only in my head. “I Don't like BS.” The British need more helicopters. The American and British soldiers know this. A problem with the British soldiers is similar to a problem with our own Marines. They refuse to complain, so they get leftovers. A retired Australian officer of great significance asked me what I thought of British soldiers. I said something to the effect of, “My opinion is suspect because I greatly respect British soldiers...” If I did not respect British soldiers, I would not keep going into combat with them.

I have common access to the basement and stratosphere of our military. Nobody wants to see the British go. Strangely, both the British and American officers give high praise to the French. The French actually will fight like mad dogs, they say.

It's always easy to find a British or American soldier who will make a passing derogatory remark about someone. If a reporter is shopping for a fight, those are easy to generate. Yes, it's easy to find Brits who say bad things about Americans, but definitely harder to find Americans who will say something bad about Brits. We have some kind of strange reflex that prevents us from talking bad about Brits. Our soldiers respect the Brits and do not talk bad about them. But it's easy to find British soldiers who complain about other British units, and Americans who complain about other American units. U.S. Marines complain about U.S. Army; Army complains about Marines. This battalion complains about that battalion. Soldiers complain. My ears overflow with vacuous complaints and also with real ones. There is no real complaint against the British other than they need to field their military with better gear. The British fight very well, but they need better gear.

This message was sent to me from a British officer:

“I know that, in the past, us Brits have rather banged on about our COIN experience and there is a natural (and not necessarily unhelpful) rivalry between US and UK forces that has existed for 70 odd years. But there is deep respect for the US military in the British Army, but particularly the US Army and USMC with which we have more contact, especially the doctrinal transformation over the past few years. This goes from the lowest level, for example the Scottish infantry soldiers working with the MEU in Garmsir in 2008, to the highest levels of our command.

Let me give you just one example. In July 2006 a Danish soldier working under UK command in Helmand was grievously wounded in a rather beleaguered (it was under repeated direct and indirect fire) outpost in Helmand – if I remember correctly it was Musa Qaleh. The compound was too small for a Chinook to land to get the casualty out and the UK's small helicopters could not fly in the day time because of the extreme heat and altitude. The soldier was dying and he couldn't wait. A battle-group level hasty air assault operation was planned to secure a landing zone nearby in Taleban

dominated area and the intent was for the small garrison to fight its way out to get the casualty to that landing zone. There was no doubt, not only must we expect to take further casualties, we could lose a Chinook. Then, a US Blackhawk medical helicopter swept in and then out of the compound with the casualty who I know was still alive when he later made it home to Denmark. The whole attitude, despite the acute risk involved, was one of "no problem, anytime, just ask", as we say, "normal jogging". Yet, no one who knew of that single event would have had anything other than the greatest admiration for those involved and the organization to which they belonged."

Our relationship with Great Britain is more than merely healthy. It's very strong. The British are very close family. We are in a serious fight in Afghanistan. This is a team, and some members play harder than others. The British are ready and willing to throw hard shots. The British know the price of fighting. And they know that the price for not fighting can be much higher.

Please support this mission by making a [direct contribution](#). Without your support, the mission will end. Thank you for helping me tell the full story of the struggle for Iraq and Afghanistan.

Comments (37)

Worried

37. Sunday, 11 January 2009 05:28
(*The ghost of Pongo Wearing*)

Mr Yon is on the ball as per, what we really need in the UK is a US invasion to rid us our Government. They have no scruples about committing our soldiers to military operations in order to capture good headlines - otherwise known as 'spin' - but have not the faintest care or clue as to the implications and responsibilities that go with those decisions. I like the US, you are our brothers and I have great respect for your Armed Forces but you all need to understand that by far the hardest fight Her Majesties Forces face is with our slimy and treacherous neo-communist Government. They will not rest until they have destroyed the traditions and fighting capabilities of HMF because we are all that stand between them and their dream of a neo-communist dictatorship.

Why didn't we finish the job in Basra? Because Blair was so frightened of the bad publicity large casualty figures would bring he bottled it and left us swinging in the breeze. Do you think British soldiers liked that??!

If we don't have a change of Government soon then an equally shameful situation is likely to develop in Helmand, not because of the men on the ground but because of the scum pulling the strings in London.

Yet you are presenting medals to Blair, the architect of HMF's problems - looks like he's conned you lot too.

Aww poopsie are we maddums at the mean nasty septics

36. Saturday, 10 January 2009 23:08
(*Nichevo*)

Meanwhile, Glenn Brown, you'll be speaking Mandarin too, and I guess it'll be all right with you, as long as you got to take the piss out of us once more.

Jackass. I won't bother to rebut your incorrect statistics but it's funnier than Benny Hill how you can say anything you want about us and we have to swallow it (I mean turning a hair at "septic" makes us look like some kind of rubes, eh?), but any criticism of you, whether entirely fair or maybe a little over the top, absolutely sends you into fits of diarrhea.

I don't know why this Rykehaven is so hard on you lot, but while I feel bad for any other Brit who may be exposed to it, somehow I don't mind when it's you.

funny...was just thinking...

35. Saturday, 10 January 2009 22:59
(*Orbit Rain*)

funny..I was just thinking about gifting a pistol to a friend in the Britain's service (who previously gifted me a knife)...I don't think he could take it home tho...

:|

wtf and lol

British soldiers

34. Saturday, 10 January 2009 21:02
(*david Mullins*)

British soldiers are like any soldiers. They have some of the finest in the worl and I am sure some that they may not be so proud of especially the younger ones adn maybe some in regular units.

BUT, I worked along side many SAS professionals and I am as impressed by them as any fighting force in the world. I have worked with many

top units and they, the SAS are some of the finest. I was honored to e been able to serve and share experiences with them. many times teh media just does not know of people listed to distorted medial stories. We teh professionals know better and the best. God Bless teh m all. David

Brits and Yanks

33. Saturday, 10 January 2009 20:21
(Bunzii)

I served in both Afghanistan and Iraq with British troops and contractors. I have nothing but the utmost respect for those men and women. To imply we have some kind of conflict or superior opinion of ourselves over them is total shiite or bullocks! (as the fellas would say) I even spent a week in London going around with several friends from the "zone" and had a great time. Was treated with a great deal of respect and enjoyed y self considerably. A great sense of humor but when professionalism was required, they were all over it!! Its BS to think anything else. Just war-Bush haters looking for another place to divide and conquer!!

That's right....

32. Saturday, 10 January 2009 18:58
(Glenn Brown)

America doesn't need anyone else. In fact: everyone else is utter crap. Always have been. You can do this all by yourselves. So crack on big lads!
Holy Christ, is it any wonder the World hates this attitude? Seriously, arrogance doesn't really hit it, does it? A society with a life expectancy lower than the most of rest of the Western World, an infant mortality rate lower than the rest of the Western World, an execution rate higher than the rest of the Western World (put together actually), a literacy rate lower than most of the Western World. And some 40 million of its citizens can't afford Health Insurance (why isn't there a public health system? Is the Fire service private too? Tell me the difference.....) Yet....it controls 70% of the entire Worlds' wealth? Home of the brave, land of the free? A purportedly very Christian nation that despises dread Socialism (a ideology where all the people, through Government instruments, unselfishly CARE for each other) How long before your next President is assassinated? How long before the next school grand massacre? A land where nearly 30,000 people will die of gun-shot wounds this coming year? This is democracy? This is the home of freedom? The Great American Way? You know what? Fcuk you. In 50 years time, when we're all learning Mandarin as our second language, I hope your kids remember that America was once supreme, once impregnable and above all.....right.

Meh.

31. Saturday, 10 January 2009 17:55
(Matt Delventhal)

The Army and the Air Force and the Navy and the Marines all talk crap about eachother. For that matter, there are plenty of individual companies where soldiers from different platoons are barely on speaking terms. If Brits and Yanks didn't talk crap about eachother, it would mean there was something seriously wrong with the military culture. They'll work together well enough when the time comes.

RE: Yon

30. Saturday, 10 January 2009 16:44
(Rykehaven)

Yon said: "We have some kind of strange reflex that prevents us from talking bad about Brits. Our soldiers respect the Brits and do not talk bad about them."

I call BS.

US soldiers, sailors and airmen won't talk to YOU about what we think of the British.

If some random journalist walked up to me and started asking leading questions (no matter what the subject), I'd ignore you/blow-you-off too. It wouldn't be because I like or respect the British. ANY US military serviceman would react the same way: We'd ignore in that situation.

(and it's not the first time some journalist magically tried to "misrepresent" a "no-comment" into a "they-agree-with-me" spoof)

Rykehaven - again

29. Saturday, 10 January 2009 16:43
(Hohum)

"Rykehaven - Senior NCOs and Officers know how to handle the Brits appropriately: We IGNORE them. Because if there's one thing the Brits can't stand, it's to be DISMISSED and reminded of just how irrelevant they are.

It's a long-standing policy in the US Military in regards to the "public-face".

I find it difficult to believe that the primary motivation when dealing with a leading ally is based on how to annoy them best. The US services are more professional than that.

Rykehaven

28. Saturday, 10 January 2009 16:31
(Hohum)

Rykehaven - you seem to think British soldiers are responsible for choices which are actually made by the UK government. Your drivel about cowardice regarding these soldiers is sickening.

RE: westerner

27. Saturday, 10 January 2009 16:05
(Rykehaven)

Previous post cut-off:

westerner said: "I can only hope current and recent British soldiers don't share these sentiments, you would never hear an American soldier

speaking anywhere remotely near these sentiments towards the British soldier. Indeed, the British soldier is respected and treated like family if his duty happens to bring him to the States."

Yes, we WOULD.

American CIVILIANS wouldn't, but American soldiers, sailors and airmen (mostly the junior personnel) DO fight back whenever they come into contact with pompous British counterparts. You just don't hear about it because the media and even the command clam up. The junior personnel sometimes don't say anything because they don't know how to react. They don't understand why the Brits would have that kind of attitude towards them. Many others, however, DO react (especially those with experience in OIF and OEF) by bringing up the fact that the British do as little as possible, run from the militias, hide behind blast walls, get captured without discharging weapons, take credit for accomplishments not their own, etc. The trouble starts when the Brits try to pick their fights because even if they're tactically lousy, they're politically adept.

To be honest, it's the WRONG approach.

Senior NCOs and Officers know how to handle the Brits appropriately: We IGNORE them. Because if there's one thing the Brits can't stand, it's to be DISMISSED and reminded of just how irrelevant they are.

It's a long-standing policy in the US Military in regards to the "public-face".

In PRIVATE, of course, it's hard not to rip the Brits and dissect their operations. For God's sakes, it's part of our job.

I'm not talking about exercises in "whining" the way the Brits do about "blue-on-blue" either, an attitude that is rooted in the British troops' comparative inexperience/ignorance of CAS*.

I'm talking about having a meeting in the wardroom with the senior crew, and the discussion turns to the latest British screw-up such as their VBSS and Royal Marines getting captured by the Iranians. After all, we need to know what happened so it can be applied to serious boarding in the future. The Captain (as if he needed to be reminded) has to be told that the British Military's "assessment" blaming "lack of equipment" and claiming that the home ship was too far for support are BOGUS. That the British excuse for "lack of support" is meant to hide a FAR deeper flaw.

Sound familiar?

*In fact, the Army believes that the British [and Canadians et al] are responsible for the "blue-on-blue". It has something to do with coordination and wandering into other people's sectors when you're not supposed to. Considering the British lack of capability in CAS and the relative experience of US pilots, I lean towards the Army's version, but of course I'm JUST being biased.

What's important, though, is that there IS another side of the story and media people have "neglected" to mention it.

RE: Texpatriate

26. Saturday, 10 January 2009 15:21
(Rykehaven)

Texpatriate said: "I've no doubt the memo is genuine, but the quality of the British forces are simply not a matter of controversy in the US."

Agreed.

This is not a controversy in the US Media and most of the Civilian population.

There is also no controversy about the quality of British forces in the US Military.

The REAL controversy is that opinions diverge between the US Military and the US population about the quality of British forces. It was THIS divergent opinion that has done so much damage to OEF and OIF by allowing essentially "non-combat peacekeepers" to be responsible for what are still combat situations. Part of this was, admittedly, the America's confidence that the respective wars were over and that it was "safe" to let the allies walk in and have them take part in the victory.

Hubris and pride has definitely come before the fall.

I guess I have people like you to thank for that.

RE: westerner

25. Saturday, 10 January 2009 15:08
(Rykehaven)

westerner said: "I can only hope current and recent British soldiers don't share these sentiments, you would never hear an American soldier speak anywhere remotely near these sentiments towards the British soldier. Indeed, the British soldier is respected and treated like family if his duty happens to bring him to the States."

Yes, we WOULD.

American CIVILIANS wouldn't, but American soldiers, sailors and airmen (mostly the junior personnel) DO fight back whenever they come into contact with pompous British counterparts. You just don't hear about it

FYI, the word for "Brit" in the US Military is "over-rated"

24. Saturday, 10 January 2009 13:56
(Rykehaven)

Yon, considering that you declared a British victory in Basra after they pulled out last year when everyone in the US military knew they'd gotten the hell out of dodge, I'm surprised you have the gumption to write this drivel.

At any rate it's as much of an admission that the British are still over-rated in some circles; in fact, the British were dismissed by the US military long before Basra.

Does it trouble you?

That the US Military's long disdain in response to the mutual loathing of the Royal Armed Forces and their cowardice is finally leaking into American Civi minds? Or does it trouble you that those who've been reading your dispatches are being blind-sided by this reality because you avoided this subject, knowing it might restrict your British "access" if you told your readers the truth?

Your defense of the British reads like any other self-congratulatory BS lecture the British soldiers and sailors give the US military, then fail to back up whenever they get captured or hunker down silently behind blast walls, hoping the militias don't notice their remote base camps. You may be able to convince civilians otherwise, but it won't change things where it really counts: in the field and on the high seas, the British hype is not a deterrent; the Taliban affiliates, like the Basra militias want to negotiate with the BRITISH military, not the American. We BOTH know what that means even if most civis don't.

Oh, and the fact that they "don't have the right equipment" is bogus and everybody from Iraq to Afghanistan knows it, so let's put the lie to your ass-covering.

The British could have brought all the helos and airlift they wanted: even if they couldn't, they would have fed off of our own supplies parasitically just as they have done since the beginning of OEF (which they would and NOBODY who knows about Britain's dependency on American inventories, airlift and logistics could claim otherwise).

The ONE PROBLEM the British have has NOTHING to do with "equipment shortages".

It never has.

Their problem is one of MISSION: if they got the helicopters, WHAT WOULD THEY DO WITH THEM? From the beginning, they never had ANY intention of going into population centers and fighting the militias in Helmand (the same goes for Basra), and everybody involved in theater knows that.

So why are the British in Afganistan?

It sounds infuriatingly petty (and it is): they're in theater to "show up" and claim credit in case there's a victory to be had. Then claim the Americans couldn't have done it without them. The same is true of every other "ally"; the Japanese, the Koreans, the Dutch, the French, the Germans, etc: their all married to the idea that America "owes" them for their "sacrifices" in protecting America. Read their newspapers and find out.

Hell, read MICHAEL YON'S webiste and find out.

No, the US military doesn't buy this drivel, but plenty of other people do. Geopolitics at its best.

If the British had helos, they'd be able to cover more ground and project themselves over the breadth of their area of responsibility, engaging in wide-scale operations. No duh, everybody in the military involved with OEF and OIF knows that and we've been offering our NATO "allies" the airlift to bring in whatever supplies necessary for YEARS.

So your "lack of equipment" is bogus because the British had EVERY opportunity to get that equipment flown in, at least during the Bush administration.

What we ALSO know is that, to the British and every other NATO country, having the "right" equipment is not desirable. Again, if they HAD the right equipment, what excuse would they have in AVOIDING engaging with the militias. Having that equipment would mean they would have to document its use, DOUBLY so if it's provided and run in tandem with supplies provided by the US. There'd be no more HIDING.

British heroes

23. Saturday, 10 January 2009 13:20
(P. Jack Driscoll)

There is no perfect group of men, whether US or otherwise, however I can only expressed admiration for the British forces from what I have read at Micheal Yon and other sites. God bless them for their heroic efforts.

I am praying for them daily.

God bless them all.

P. Jack Driscoll

Mutual Respect!

22. Saturday, 10 January 2009 12:30
(Christina Finn)

The British Military Personnel and Veterans are an amazing Lot! We as Patriotic Americans have a great deal of RESPECT for those whom have served along side our Sons and Daughters. I Believe and have seen the after effects of Troops that have come home to a Nation that does not support those that have been wounded in harms way. All of England's Veterans Health care Facilities have been shut down....Do you think their government gives a flip about the Man or Woman on the ground if they are supplied with inadequate equipment??? Freedom costs.....

They better look seriously into their fiscal budgets and determine if their lifestyles are worth Defending. Please, dear God; continue to Defend the Defenders. There will never be an influx of dedicated, viable future soldiers as long as an administration, will choose to underfund the Benefits and Services the Veteran has Earned and Deserves.

I think the World of the British Military Men & Women; the Veterans that I have met are Loyal, and Fierce to secure FREEDOM. I filmed a documentary with the BBC regarding our coalition troops Veterans' Health care issues. They are a grand bunch and deserve to be RESPECTED and Revered for their Heart.

This article is one woman's perspective sitting behind a computer in a Freeland.....Michael your perspective is one to share and spread; your having served alongside these Heroic individuals. What ever land they are representing they Fight alongside one another...To accomplish the mission. We respect your dispatches. With our son serving in Afghanistan, I rely upon your Truth!!

As an aside: For those sites that may say that "We lost in Vietnam," that never happened. Our Military NEVER lost a Battle, the War was lost in D.C. Read history.... the leader and general of the North Vietnamese Army wrote in his memoirs, if we had just bombed another #2 weeks they would have had to Surrender. Any fight worth starting should be played out to fruition.

God Bless you efforts, and the Brave Men & Women whose stories you share with us here waiting at Home.

Respectfully,

The "Pillow Lady" Christina Finn a Blue Star MOM

The Special Relationship

21. Saturday, 10 January 2009 12:20
(Charley)

Let me address the comments above implying British 'arrogance'. In the past, the Brits pretty much considered themselves to be peerless soldiers in the West. A thoroughly professional volunteer Army fought a dozen dirty little wars after the last big-un, including the only successful campaign against Communist guerrillas, against a relatively sophisticated South American foe 8,000 miles from home and badly out-numbered and came out genreally victorious. Not to mention a 30 year campaign against a committed and professional terrorist organisation (thank God Al Queda hasn't got IRA operators on their pay-roll!) I was part of that Army for 31 years until the Summer of last year and fought in 4 of those 'conflicts'. My father fought in 3 of those 'bush-fires'.

We were peerless throughout the 70's, 80,s and most of the 90's. The American's had only been professional (after the draft) for a limited period, lacked experience, good quality officers and maintained personal soldiering standards (navigation, CV fitness and field-craft) significantly lower than their counterparts in the UK, Canadian or Australian forces. Any honest American soldier who completed a course/exercise with soldiers from any of those nations will admit as much. Hardly a surprise given the size of the American Army (and the USMC is bigger than all 3 Brit services together). The Germans have a saying: "Kleiner ist Feiner" - smaller is better. It's always been easy to train harder when you have a smaller force, can be selective in recruiting and have a constant input from on-going operations. And when you have a Family Regiment tradition and ethos. So yes, Brits were occasionally scathing about the performance of Americans, but it's also part of our culture to 'take the piss' and constantly attempt to rile your friends - so no-one should take it too much to heart. These days, the Aussies are scathing about their 'Pom' counterparts in very much the same way. Fair enough - I hold them to be probably the best troops in the World today.

That all being so, the American soldier has improved dramatically since 9/11 and the Army has developed some top notch units. The USMC has always been held in high regard and never more so than now. The US can justifiably be proud of its' Army, which is matchless in the conventional field and developing an intelligent approach to COIN. As the British Army (and Royal Marines) approach exhaustion through over-stretch, and many outstanding married young officers and JNCOs leave under pressure from worried spouses, the US Army seems to go from strength to strength. And where would we be without the outstanding American Air force? So chill out....if the shit fits, wear it: You really weren't very good. Now you're so much better and the West would crumble without you.

Get on with it!

20. Saturday, 10 January 2009 10:35
(Joe Norman)

Folks, this is about survival of our civilization. When I say "our" I mean western civilization.... brits, Yanks, French, Aussies, N.Z.,

Canucks.....we are ALL in this thing together, and I'm willing to bet that no people better understand the truth of that than the guys doing the fighting. Of course you will have the odd bonehead who will piss and whine about things.....it IS after all the military, and that's what we do:COMPLAIN!!.....but when it comes down to brass tacks, the Western fighter is a capable and fierce Warrior, limited only by equipment, tactical doctrine, and political dogma. I'd be willing to bet that ANY combat trooper would agree with that, and I'll take the hard won observations of the Warriors every day over those of an agenda driven hack like Sylvester.

Nothing to see here...

19. Saturday, 10 January 2009 10:31
(*Texpatriate*)

This sounds to me like the British MoD is cranking up a pitch for more money, which they probably need, by pointing to the loss of American confidence and all that it portends.

I've no doubt the memo is genuine, but the quality of the British forces are simply not a matter of controversy in the US. It's not a leading item in our papers; Bill O'Reilly hasn't fulminated about it on Fox News; nobody's talking about it in the break room. And with all that Mr. Obama will have on his plate when he takes office, some incremental realignment of a fully-functioning military alliance would seem to be near the bottom of his to-do list.

Having said all that, the British army does need more soldiers and new hardware. Heck, if someone will set up a fund somewhere, I'd even kick in a couple of bucks.

rhymes with Yank

18. Saturday, 10 January 2009 09:25
(*Septic tank*)

Well, the contempt is "real." A bit like their contempt for the French (surrender monkeys), the Italians (turncoats), etc. It's a cultural "diss the stereotype" thing, partly ironic, partly meant. A lot of it is received wisdom of the sort that gets repeated again and again till it becomes a stereotype -- the Yanks are "cowboys," "gungho" or whatever. It's a self-respect thing too, as someone mentioned above. They like to believe that they have a superior, stiff-upper-lipped ironic attitude to all things that Americans couldn't possibly understand or appreciate.

It's harmless mostly.

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It's harmless mostly.

Birts are A-OK in my experience

16. Saturday, 10 January 2009 09:17
(*ecosium*)

I've worked with the Brits on several occasions and found them to be really top notch. Great guys. None of my fellow Soldiers really say anything bad about them and we are sorry to see them leave us in Iraq.

Rachel Sylvester article, etc.

15. Saturday, 10 January 2009 08:49
(*Pete Hartwick*)

I don't know Rachel and have no idea of her reputation for insightful opinion or her access to accurate sources of information inside the government. That being said: I tried to extract her point. I couldn't decide whether she was playing the typical "pompous opinion columnist" who simultaneously seeks to a) offer deep, penetrating analysis to the highest levels of government, of a kind and of a degree that would never be uttered by official underlings concerning the future relationship between our two governments; b) by reference to an unsourced "memo" that purports to call the whole spectrum of the UK's military capability and commitment into serious question, she seems to infer having some kind of inside track with a super source, thereby conveying an "of course this is the fact of the matter" impression.

However, when read closely, the story doesn't say very much that's definitive or helpful. Rather, its value is mostly sensational and frankly, it seemed a little too self-aggrandizing. I kept wondering: What is the problem she presumes to understand and present? It's not clear whether it's the bad state of material, equipment and logistics (apparently valid), or is it the training and willingness of the combat soldier to engage in combat (apparently baseless)? The two issues are vastly different and mixing them together as she does actually frustrates, rather than enhances, understanding. In fact, if someone were to tell me that she's kуст anti-military and anti-US and she's just trying to stir up a resentful backlash among the British citizenry, that would at least make some sense out of the article.

In my USAF career, I served with Brits, Canadians and Australians. I saw the very subtle "put downs" of US forces by the Brits -- never the Canadians or Aussies -- and I asked a Canadian pilot with whom I'd become good friends about it. He acknowledged that I wasn't imagining things and when I asked Why, he quietly said that we Americans ought to just let them "vent" because they needed to do so for their own healthy self-respect.

He went on to paint a picture I'll never forget: Imagine, he said, that one day in the future, the Philippines becomes THE world super power, while the US somehow found itself as a second tier player on the world stage, no longer able to call all the shots as it saw fit.

But, because of historical ties and national interest, it was an ally of the Philippines and there was still a fond memory of MacArthur in Manila, etc. What do you think you'd say about the Philippine army or navy or air force?

Hard to imagine the scenario, yes. But that's just about what happened to Great Britain in the span of less than 50 years, between Victoria and WWII. To him, WWI was the real culprit: so many young men were lost in that stupid slaughter of innocents, it decimated the population's prime reproduction demographic and achieved nothing except pave the way for another slaughter twenty years later. The country never recovered, either psychically or numerically. The British people were driven into survival mode and lost any appetite for world power status. He pointed out that the US has never seen casualties anywhere near those levels in a foreign war and we can't possibly understand the effect it would have on a population. He was right, of course.

Interesting perspective. It gave me a different appreciation of my British colleagues and comrades from that point onward.

Rachel Sylvester Opinion article, etc.

14. Saturday, 10 January 2009 08:43
(Pete Hartwick)

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Show us the memo

13. Saturday, 10 January 2009 06:47
(Kefola)

To columnist Rachel Sylvester who wrote this piece, I would say, show us this memo.

It contains an extraordinary claim and deserves to be treated with more seriousness than just a fleeting aside in a personal opinion article.

How can a newspaper columnist write a serious article in part based on a memo she hasn't seen and lie comfortably in her bed at night while brave British soldiers sleep uneasy in Helmand Province.

From Michael Yon's war reporting and that of others, it is clear that the British soldier need make no excuses for his performance these past years in Iraq and Afghanistan.

If anything good comes of this article, it would be perhaps the realisation that when it comes to equipment, more investment is needed in the UK.

Sounds about right.

12. Saturday, 10 January 2009 04:49
(Biped)

To summarise: British troops are good guys, they fight hard, they fight well, but they haven't got enough kit, and what they HAVE got isn't up to the job couldn't have said it better myself. 'twas ever thus, and in the light of continuing under-funding by an incompetent government, it will continue to be the case.

I think that the British attitude (at ground level) is changing dramatically towards our septic cousins due to ongoing operations. Yes, the US

forces did have a lousy reputation with British troops for some years due to a few serious blue-on-blue incidents, and a general perception that they were very gung-ho in their approach to warfare. That was before 8 years of warfare in which the US forces learned a good deal about asymmetric warfare on a grand scale; 8 years in which that knowledge has been put to good use and 8 years in which that change of mindset and operational performance has been clearly demonstrated to their British cousins, who have watched, learned and come to appreciate and admire the US approach.

Much of the bitching these days at ground level has stopped. There might be a bit of envy, there might be a bit whining about kit, but there is a good deal of (if at sometimes grudging) respect. British soldiers serving today will be the very FIRST to show gratitude to the US flying services as it is they who on many occasions have held our enemy at bay and stopped our outposts being over-run, when our own air power has been in too short supply.

Americans and rivalries

11. Saturday, 10 January 2009 03:26
(Plant_Life)

There will always be rivalry between different nations but we are all here to achieve the same objectives. There are still a fair few bitter people out there because of the various blue on blues which have happened over the years because of the different ROE.

As for the woman who said she is Irish and her hubby is a Highlander unless you were born in Ireland and your husband in Scotland you are not Irish or Scottish, nearly descended from there.

UK Warriors

10. Friday, 09 January 2009 23:44
(Sarmajor)

I worked with British Commandos in Kabul and with a team that came down to Jalalabad to assess NCO leadership in the ANA. These guys were relegated to a training mission but were more than willing to fight. I loved having them on our convoys as an extra couple of guns. They do need to upgrade their equipment but they work well with what they have. Great guys.

Sarmajor

RE Brits

9. Friday, 09 January 2009 23:41
(Tim O)

My experience with them was back in the 80s, my brother from the 70s; on both of our parts there was nothing but respect for the Brits. Their gear may need upgrading, ok fine, but the soldiers themselves were, and from what I've read since then, are, top notch

Red Flag

8. Friday, 09 January 2009 23:40
(ScottBA)

"My husband is born and raised Highlander. So culturally, we both had no love lost with the Brits growing up"

Not quite sure what you mean, I am from the Highlands of Scotland and into the British Army, the attitude you suggest is more at home in the 18th Century than modern Scotland.

As to the article, there will always be friendly rivalry, but between the UK and US there isn't much we cannot achieve.

Respect

7. Friday, 09 January 2009 21:38
casstx

I'm Irish. My husband is born and raised Highlander. So culturally, we both had no love lost with the Brits growing up. We're both Americans and he's SOF. He's expressed nothing but respect for the British forces in both Iraq and Afgh. You're right, they don't complain, they get the job done. He works with them on and off and said they're always dependable, sometimes crazy, and get the job done, just like his guys. I hope the Brits don't lose their hope and let the media lead them down the same path ours has because we're all in the fight for our lives. We need to come together, not let differences tear us apart.

Red Flag

6. Friday, 09 January 2009 21:34
(Been their done that and got a tshirt)

What better way to get the Brits motivated than to tell them they suck and whine like bitter prom queens without a date...or that they talk a good game but deliver a ...well I won't go there...but I will say they talk and talk and talk and did I mention that they run their Fing mouth to the sounds of my ex-wife.

But in all fairness the article resonates a sound of a political stirring of the pot as a precursor to motivate.

Red Flag

5. Friday, 09 January 2009 21:15
(Thick Mick)

ARRSE!! C'mon nobody pays attention to that women's web site. WTF.

Those who can fight, fight! Those who can't become brilliant literary warriors etching their bitch, whine and mock of everyone else. 90% of those complaining about the US have an inferiority complex and/or lack their respective gender qualifications...their expression gives it away... "101".

Now concerning the article it seems to me to be a little bit of political stirring the pot.

Red Flag

4. Friday, 09 January 2009 19:51
(westerner)

ARRSE, the site that has posters regularly sneering in contempt about US troops, "blue-on-blue", "all the gear and no idea", "undisciplined, trigger-happy", "Cletus with a gun", "cowardly" (lost in Vietnam, only entered WW1&2 at the last minute to make money), "gunslingers with no clue about COIN", "N. Ireland", "Malaya", "N. Ireland", "Malaya". etc. If they represent the real feelings of British Army veterans towards US troops it's very sad indeed. I can only hope current and recent British soldiers don't share these sentiments, you would never hear an American soldier speak anywhere remotely near these sentiments towards the British soldier. Indeed, the British soldier is respected and treated like family if his duty happens to bring him to the States. I've never heard anything remotely like this from Australian, New Zealand or Canadian veterans, all who have also served with or alongside US troops, rivalry ...yes, contempt and sneers.... no.

UK and EU

3. Friday, 09 January 2009 19:29
(Janis)

The EU Lisbon treaty (constitution of the EU) has just about sewed up the ability of the UK to do much of anything on their own. The EU does not want a special relationship across the Atlantic and would prefer EU armed forces to NATO, although I don't know who would pay for them. The new Brit carrier is penciled in to go to the EU navy (see EUReferendum.blogspot.com and the associated blog "Defense of the Realm"). Sadly, I'm not at all encouraged about future relations.

No shit

2. Friday, 09 January 2009 19:00
(dfp21)

Try to take an objective view of the Brits' performance in Iraq. They were made irrelevant in Basra by the militias, and they were humiliated by the Iranian Navy. That's quite a reputation they have now.

Article linked to Brit Army Rumour Service (ARRSE) website

1. Friday, 09 January 2009 18:33
(Petriburg)

Thanks Michael, I too read the doom-laden Times pieces and wondered where this claim emanated from...

I think the ARRSErs will be watching this post with interest!

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