The sexual humiliation of Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison was not an invention of maverick guards, but part of a system of ill-treatment and degradation used by special forces soldiers that is now being disseminated among ordinary troops and contractors who do not know what they are doing, according to British military sources.

The techniques devised in the system, called R2I - resistance to interrogation - match the crude exploitation and abuse of prisoners at the Abu Ghraib jail in Baghdad.

One former British special forces officer who returned last week from Iraq, said: "It was clear from discussions with US private contractors in Iraq that the prison guards were using R2I techniques, but they didn't know what they were doing."

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