



America's most senior general flew into Britain for top secret talks on the invasion of Iraq 11 months before the attack on Saddam Hussein's regime. Details of the classified meeting, held at RAF Brize Norton, Oxfordshire, suggest Tony Blair's Government was involved in detailed discussions about toppling the Iraqi dictator earlier than previously disclosed.

American General Tommy Franks flew in to the base in April 2002 to attend a summit meeting called by the then Defence Secretary Geoff Hoon. It followed similar meetings Gen Franks had in Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. Secret Pentagon documents reveal Mr Hoon asked about 'US plans for Iraq'.

Exactly what was said has been censored, but declassified sections of the documents show Gen Franks had a separate meeting with Admiral Sir Michael Boyce, then Britain's chief of defence staff, and senior officers.

At that meeting, 'regional issues' including Iraq were discussed, and Gen Franks was told the Ministry of Defence had 'put together a small cell' for 'thinking strategically about Iraq' and 'what courses of action are available to handle the regime'.

Mr Hoon did not mention the meeting when he gave evidence to the Chilcot Inquiry on Iraq earlier this year. And Admiral Boyce, now Lord Boyce, told the Chilcot panel he had set up an Iraq planning group, but only in May 2002.

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