A Critical Discourse Analysis of Active and Passive Voice in Three News Texts

Asma Salem Ali Albawendi \ English Language Department - Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Kasr Khiaar - Elmergib University
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Abstract

This paper applies CDA (critical discourse analysis) to display the hidden relationship between language and power in the discourse of the media; it focuses on the issues which are related to the use of passive or active voice, and tries to investigate which forms of voice are used (passive or active). Data have been collected from three different news texts on the subject of Iraq War Logs. The data have been analysed by using the framework model of Fowler et al. [6] and the findings have been discussed within the framework which is provided by Fairclough, N. [4].

The results show that there is a hidden relationship between language and power in the discourse of the media. Access to the media discourse is limited to specific people only, while other people lack this access. Moreover, the types of voice (passive or active) that are used in different texts determine which sentences are more powerful.

Key words: Critical discourse analysis, media discourse, active and passive voice, language, power.

حليل الخطاب النقدي للمنصوص والمجهول في ثلاثة نصوص إخبارية

ملخص:


تظهر النتائج أن هناك علاقة خفية بين اللغة والقوة في خطاب الإعلام. يقتصر الوصول إلى الخطاب الإعلامي على أشخاص محذرين فقط، بينما يفترض الآخرون إلى هذا الوصول، علاوة على ذلك، فإن أنواع الصوت (المبني للمجهول أو المعلوم) المستخدمة في نصوص مختلفة تحدد الجمل الأكثر قوة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: حيل الخطاب النقدي، الخطاب الإعلامي، المبني للمعلوم والمجهول، اللغة، القوة.
1. Introduction

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is an approach which deals with the analysis of written and spoken words to expose the discursive sources of power Van Dijk, T. [9]. CDA is defined as “fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language” Wodak, R. [11], (p. 2). In particular, “[CDA] studies real, and often extended, instances of social interaction which take (partially) linguistic form. The critical approach is distinctive in its view of (a) the relationship between language and society, and (b) the relationship between analysis and the practices analysed” Wodak, R. [10], (p. 173).

1.1. Focus and purpose of the study

The main purpose of this paper is to display the hidden relationship between language and power; it concentrates on the issues which are related to the use of passive or active voice, and tries to investigate which forms of voice are used (passive or active).

1.2. The research question of the study

By analysing the specific data, this paper tries to answer these questions:
Which voice is used in these newspapers (passive or active) and why?

1.3. Methodology

The data of this paper were collected from three different news texts on the subject of Iraq War Logs. The researcher decided here to narrow her choice to indicate the frequency of use of passive and active in the three different texts, and to choose only six sentences to analyse in detail, as more than six sentences in each article would undoubtedly go beyond the scope of this paper. The researcher will analyse the texts by using the framework model of Fowler et al. [6] and discuss the findings within the framework which is provided by Fairclough, N [4]. A copy of these texts has been attached in the appendix.

2. Literature review

2.1. The aim of CDA theory

It is useful to explain the terms Critical and Discourse in CDA in order to give a general idea about the approach. Cameron, D. [2] defines the word ‘critical’ as “a way of understanding the social world drawn from critical theory” (p. 123), whereas ‘discourse’ is defined as “more
than just language use: it is language use, whether speech or writing, seen as a type of social practice” Fairclough, N. [4] (p.28).

Wodak, R. [11] states that the main purpose of CDA theory is “to investigate critically social inequality as it is expressed, signalled, constituted, legitimized and so on by language use”, (p. 11). In addition, Fairclough, N. [5] claims the aim of CDA is to:

- Systematically explore often opaque relationships of causality and determination between (a) discursive practices, events and texts, and (b) wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes; to investigate how such practices, events and texts arise out of and are ideologically shaped by relations of power and struggles over power; and explore how the opacity of these relationships between discourse and society is itself a factor securing power and hegemony, (p.135)

2.2. **The relationship between language and power in media discourse**

It is claimed that there are a distinction between power and language regarding on the position of power and discourse. Fairclough, N. [3], for example, defines this distinction as “power in discourse, and power behind discourse”, (p. 43). As has been initially stated, the purpose of this paper is to talk about the discourse of the media; however, the researcher will concentrate on this point.

According to Caldas-Coulthard, C.R. [1], media discourse is controlled by a specific powerful group, and she also connects media power relations to gender. Caldas-Coulthard goes on to indicate that power has a negative trend because it is held by some group in society and excludes other groups, though, some authors such as Fairclough, N. [3] claim that there are no total power relations because there are different methods which try to enable all the people in society to gain access to power. He argues that “those who hold power at a particular moment have to constantly reassert their power, and those who do not hold power are always liable to make a bid for power”, (p. 68). Before applying CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis) to the data that have been collected, the researcher will give a brief definition of the voice and the types of voice, and will also mention the differences between the active and passive voice.
2.3. Passive and active voice

Quirk et al. [8] define a voice as “a grammatical category which makes it possible to view the action of a sentence in two ways, without change in the facts reported”, (p. 801). For the aim of this paper, the researcher will analyse the two types of voice, active and passive. We generally use the active voice when we want to emphasize the doer of the action, whereas we use the passive voice when we want to concentrate on the action rather than the doer or when the doer of the action is unimportant or unknown.

As the researcher mentioned earlier, in the introduction, all of her data are from British newspaper texts reporting political events. The researcher has to take into consideration that spoken discourse and written discourse are different from each other. In particular, the passive voice is not very frequently used in the language of spoken discourse if the speaker needs to highlight something, whereas written discourse shows more precise devices for clausal connecting than spoken discourse. According to Fairclough, N [4], the use of the passive voice in news reporting can have the effect of obscuring the agent of political events. This concentration on existing textual features distinguishes critical discourse analysis from related approaches. As he argues, “An issue which is always important is whether agency, causality and responsibility are made explicit or left vague in media accounts of important events”, (p. 181).

2.3.1. Differences between passive and active

Givon, T. [7] makes a distinction between the active and passive voice, and claims that “(the) neutral, less presuppositional main, active, declarative, affirmative clause-type is also the most frequent in discourse”, (p. 50); Givon, T. [7] also states that “a construction will be considered syntactically more complex if it departs from the routine speech-processing strategy established by the norm, that is, the neutral pattern”, (p. 74). Moreover, Quirk et al. [8] suggest that the difference between the two voice categories is that “the passive adds a form of the auxiliary Be and the past participle (the-ed form) of the main verb”, (p. 801).

At this stage, the unanswered question is: which form of the voice is used in these different articles (passive or active)? The choice of the passive or active voice in the sentences presented indicates that there is a crucial role to the sentences. Fowler et al. [6] propose that there are two important points regarding the passive. Firstly, “the naturally prominent first
phrase in the sentence, which in actives is occupied by the agent of a process, is in passives occupied by the object”, (p. 31). They go on to suggest that the object is given a focus, and that the agent is deleted.

3. **Data Analysis**

As mentioned earlier, this paper researches the methods of representing voice in the discourse of the media. In this paper, the researcher used three different papers in order to analyse her data. The topic of these papers is Iraq War Logs. The researcher realized by analysing these texts that all of them share the same idea, which is that although Iraqi who expected to have a strong power in the media, most information are not clear because we do not know who did it. The reason for that will be shown by analysing the three texts.

Because the researcher will use the model of Fowler et al. [6] as a framework for analysing her data, a brief description of this model will be explained. Fowler et al. [6] indicate that there are three linguistic points that must be taken into account when we analyse the passive or active voice in newspaper texts. The first point is to note the difference between the reports in the newspapers: for instance, one report is in the passive and another is in the active voice; secondly, to note which circumstances are described in the newspapers; thirdly, to note the methods by which the different participants in the reported processes are characterized.

To analyse the data, the researcher will classify the frequency of passive and active sentences in a separate table, and then the researcher will analyse the agents, process (active or passive) and the circumstances of the sentence in the three articles.

**Table (1): Total number of active and passive voice frequency and agent deletions in passive voice**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Newspaper name</th>
<th>Frequency of active voice</th>
<th>Frequency of passive voice</th>
<th>Number of agent deletions in passive voice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>The Guardian</em></td>
<td>52</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12 with agent deletion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2 with no agent deletion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Daily Telegraph</em></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5 with agent deletion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3 with no agent deletion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>The Independent</em></td>
<td>38</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11 with agent deletion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>33 with no agent deletion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The *Guardian* article uses the active voice more than the other articles and this is due to the length of sentences in this article. However, if we look at the use of passive and active in each particular newspaper, we can see the differences of frequency. From the above table, the active voice appears more frequently than the passive. In particular, the active voice in the *Guardian* article appears 52 times and the passive only 14, whereas the frequency of the active voice in the other two articles is nearly the same, 37 and 38, with only 8 for the passive in the *Telegraph* and 14 for the passive in *The Independent*.

### 3.1. Agent deletion

In *The Guardian*, we had 10 uses of the passive voice with agent deletion and 4 passive with no agent deletion. In contrast, there were 4 uses of the passive with agent deletion and 3 with no agent deletion in the *Telegraph* article. The agent is deleted from 11 uses of the passive in *The Independent* and not deleted from 3 passive. It seems that *The Guardian* is trying to avoid the main agency whereas although the *Telegraph* uses the passive as a part about the agency.

The researcher will begin by analysing the article which has been taken from *The Guardian* newspaper. The title of this article is *Iraq War Logs: secret files show US ignored torture*. The following table indicates the kinds of voice that are used (passive or active).

**Table (2): Passive and active sentences from *The Guardian* newspaper**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The sentence</th>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Affected</th>
<th>Circumstance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Insurgent suspects are led away by US forces.</td>
<td>US forces</td>
<td>Passive: are led away</td>
<td>Insurgent suspects</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. They were accused by the US military.</td>
<td>US military</td>
<td>Passive: were accused</td>
<td>They (the whistleblowers)</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The report was passed to coalition forces.</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>Passive: was passed</td>
<td>The report</td>
<td>to coalition forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The logs also illustrate the readiness of US forces to unleash lethal force.</td>
<td>The logs</td>
<td>Active: illustrate</td>
<td>the readiness of US forces</td>
<td>to unleash lethal force</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The whistleblowing activists have deleted all names from the documents.

Two LA soldiers held the detainee.

According to the above table, the passive voice is used more than the active voice. The first three sentences are passive, and using this voice in sentence 1 puts the agent of the leading (US forces) in a less focal position. By itself this cannot be important. The whistleblowers did not cause the action in sentence 2; the United States military performed the action. The agent in 3 is unknown. This might mean that the writer did not specify the actors responsible for the action of passing. Thus I have trouble appreciating the dynamic of these actions. In contrast, the other three sentences in the same table are in the active voice. All of these sentences are direct, clear and concise because we know who performed the action.

The second article is from the Telegraph newspaper. It was published under the title: Iraq War Logs: key findings. The following table shows the passive and active sentences.

### Table (3): Passive and active sentences from the Telegraph newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The sentence</th>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Affected</th>
<th>Circumstance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. A commando with the Royal Marines was shot.</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>Passive: shot</td>
<td>A commando with the Royal Marines</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. British security agents were forced to change secret data including codes and signal frequencies.</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>Passive: forced</td>
<td>British security agents to change secret data including codes and signal frequencies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Two Iraqi men were punched and kicked by unidentified British soldiers.</td>
<td>unidentified</td>
<td>Passive: punched and kicked</td>
<td>Two Iraqi men</td>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. The Apache helicopter killed the two insurgents.

5. US soldiers killed innocent Iraqi civilians at road check points.


As can be seen from this table, there are 3 each active and passive sentences. The first sentences are passive. We might ask ourselves, what is the subject in sentence 1? What is the subject doing? The subject is not shooting anything else. So it is not clear who exactly is performing the verb (to shoot). Similarly, the writer in the sentence 2 may believe that who forced the British security agents to change secret data is not important. But this sentence would still be stronger in the active, with the British security agents as the actor; for instance, ‘British security agents changed secret data including codes and signal frequencies’. In sentence 3, the writer could describe the event from the point of view of the agent (The Apache helicopter) or the patient (the two insurgents), or the point of view could be neutral.

On the other hand, the active voice is used in sentence 4, and the speaker describes the event not from the agent’s point of view but from the patient’s point of view. In sentence 5, the actor who did the killing is clear: it is US soldiers. In sentence 6, US military logs are responsible for the action which is expressed by the verb ‘reveal’.

The last article is from The Independent newspaper. The title of this article is: Huge dossier of secret files shows the US ignored the torture of Iraqis. Here is a table indicating the passive and active voices that are used in this newspaper.
Table (4): Passive and active sentences from *The Independent* newspaper

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The sentence</th>
<th>Agent</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Affected</th>
<th>Circumstance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.12 Iraqi soldiers were caught on video in Tal Afar.</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>Passive: were</td>
<td>12 Iraqi soldiers</td>
<td>on video in Tal Afar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>caught</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. No Iraqi personnel have been jailed for torture.</td>
<td>-----------------------------</td>
<td>Passive: have</td>
<td>No Iraqi personnel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>been jailed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. The release has been criticised by the US government.</td>
<td>The US government</td>
<td>Passive: has</td>
<td>The release</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>been criticised</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. An Apache helicopter killed two insurgents from a mortar team.</td>
<td>An Apache helicopter</td>
<td>Active: killed</td>
<td>Two insurgents</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. American troops encountered at least 1,300 instances of Iraqi-on-Iraqi</td>
<td>American troops</td>
<td>Active:</td>
<td>1,300 instances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>torture.</td>
<td></td>
<td>encountered</td>
<td>of Iraqi-on-Iraqi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>torture</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. 3,800 airstrikes logged in the Iraq war reports.</td>
<td>Airstrikes</td>
<td>Active: logged</td>
<td>3,800</td>
<td>in the Iraq war reports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It can be seen from the above table that both the passive and active voices were used. Once again, the agent is deleted from sentences 1 and 2 and there is no reference to the manner of catching and jailing. However, the agent who is performing the action of criticism is unimportant in the (passive) sentence 3. The agent of the last three sentences is very clear because these sentences are active. In sentence 4, by identifying that it is an Apache helicopter that killed, the active voice makes it clear who is the actor in this sentence. In sentence 5, the verb (encountered) tells us what the subject (American troops) did, and the
3.2. Summary of findings
As the researcher may conclude from the above tables, Iraqis do not have access to power in the media, because from the active sentences which are presented in the three texts we can see that the US performed the action of most of the sentences. In other words, the active sentences are more powerful and easier to understand because the doers of the action in these sentences are very clear (the US). This helps us to focus our attention on the actor. If we look at the agents of each table, the results show that the US were the actors in most of these sentences. This point demonstrates the less frequent representation of the Iraqis in the media, and the representation of unimportant or unknown agents in the passive sentences; in other words, there are no sentences using the active voice that indicate that Iraqi people are the agents of the action, in spite of the war in their own land and the presence of the US in their country.

4. Conclusion
To sum up, this paper has used CDA (critical discourse analysis) to study some issues which are related to the issue of power in the media. On the basis of my study I have concluded that there is a hidden relationship between language and power in the discourse of the media. Access to the media discourse is limited to specific people only, while other people lack this access. Although it is difficult to make generalizations about the use of passive and active voices in three different texts, the frequency of active and passive has helped us to see the differences in all the texts. Moreover, the types of voice (passive or active) that are used in different texts determine which sentences are more powerful. It can be seen; by using the model of Fowler et al. [6] to apply CDA in three different texts, that the US have a strong power in the media whereas Iraqi people do not have this power in media discourse.
References


(Three different news texts on the subject of Iraq War Logs)

1. The Guardian newspaper

Iraq war logs: secret files show how US ignored torture


A grim picture of the US and Britain’s legacy in Iraq has been revealed in a massive leak of American military documents that detail torture, summary executions and war crimes.

Almost 400,000 secret US army field reports have been passed to the Guardian and a number of other international media organisations via the whistleblowing website WikiLeaks.

The electronic archive is believed to emanate from the same dissident US army intelligence analyst who earlier this year is alleged to have leaked a smaller tranche of 90,000 logs chronicling bloody encounters and civilian killings in the Afghan war.

The new logs detail how:

US authorities failed to investigate hundreds of reports of abuse, torture, rape and even murder by Iraqi police and soldiers whose conduct appears to be systematic and normally unpunished.

A US helicopter gunship involved in a notorious Baghdad incident had previously killed Iraqi insurgents after they tried to surrender.

More than 15,000 civilians died in previously unknown incidents. US and UK officials have insisted that no official record of civilian casualties exists but the logs record 66,081 non-combatant deaths out of a total of 109,000 fatalities.
The numerous reports of detainee abuse, often supported by medical evidence, describe prisoners shackled, blindfolded and hung by wrists or ankles, and subjected to whipping, punching, kicking or electric shocks. Six reports end with a detainee's apparent death.

As recently as December the Americans were passed a video apparently showing Iraqi army officers executing a prisoner in Tal Afar, northern Iraq. The log states: "The footage shows approximately 12 Iraqi army soldiers. Ten IA soldiers were talking to one another while two soldiers held the detainee. The detainee had his hands bound … The footage shows the IA soldiers moving the detainee into the street, pushing him to the ground, punching him and shooting him."

The report named at least one perpetrator and was passed to coalition forces. But the logs reveal that the coalition has a formal policy of ignoring such allegations. They record "no investigation is necessary" and simply pass reports to the same Iraqi units implicated in the violence. By contrast all allegations involving coalition forces are subject to formal inquiries. Some cases of alleged abuse by UK and US troops are also detailed in the logs.

In two Iraqi cases postmortems revealed evidence of death by torture. On 27 August 2009 a US medical officer found "bruises and burns as well as visible injuries to the head, arm, torso, legs and neck" on the body of one man claimed by police to have killed himself. On 3 December 2008 another detainee, said by police to have died of "bad kidneys", was found to have "evidence of some type of unknown surgical procedure on [his] abdomen".

A Pentagon spokesman told the New York Times this week that under its procedure, when reports of Iraqi abuse were received the US military "notifies the responsible government of Iraq agency or ministry for investigation and follow-up".

The logs also illustrate the readiness of US forces to unleash lethal force. In one chilling incident they detail how an Apache helicopter gunship gunned down two men in February 2007.
The suspected insurgents had been trying to surrender but a lawyer back at base told the pilots: "You cannot surrender to an aircraft." The Apache, callsign Crazyhorse 18, was the same unit and helicopter based at Camp Taji outside Baghdad that later that year, in July, mistakenly killed two Reuters employees and wounded two children in the streets of Baghdad.

Iraq Body Count, the London-based group that monitors civilian casualties, says it has identified around 15,000 previously unknown civilian deaths from the data contained in the leaked war logs.

Although US generals have claimed their army does not carry out body counts and British ministers still say no official statistics exist, the war logs show these claims are untrue. The field reports purport to identify all civilian and insurgent casualties, as well as numbers of coalition forces wounded and killed in action. They give a total of more than 109,000 violent deaths from all causes between 2004 and the end of 2009.

This includes 66,081 civilians, 23,984 people classed as "enemy" and 15,196 members of the Iraqi security forces. Another 3,771 dead US and allied soldiers complete the body count.

No fewer than 31,780 of these deaths are attributed to improvised roadside bombs (IEDs) planted by insurgents. The other major recorded tally is of 34,814 victims of sectarian killings, recorded as murders in the logs.

However, the US figures appear to be unreliable in respect of civilian deaths caused by their own military activities. For example, in Falluja, the site of two major urban battles in 2004, no civilian deaths are recorded. Yet Iraq Body Count monitors identified more than 1,200 civilians who died during the fighting.

Phil Shiner, human rights specialist at Public Interest Lawyers, plans to use material from the logs in court to try to force the UK to hold a public inquiry into the unlawful killing of Iraqi civilians.
He also plans to sue the British government over its failure to stop the abuse and torture of detainees by Iraqi forces. The coalition's formal policy of not investigating such allegations is "simply not permissible", he says.

Shiner is already pursuing a series of legal actions for former detainees allegedly killed or tortured by British forces in Iraq.

WikiLeaks says it is posting online the entire set of 400,000 Iraq field reports – in defiance of the Pentagon.

The whistleblowing activists say they have deleted all names from the documents that might result in reprisals. They were accused by the US military of possibly having "blood on their hands" over the previous Afghan release by redacting too few names. But the military recently conceded that no harm had been identified.

Condemning this fresh leak, however, the Pentagon said: "This security breach could very well get our troops and those they are fighting with killed. Our enemies will mine this information looking for insights into how we operate, cultivate sources and react in combat situations, even the capability of our equipment."

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2. The Telegraph

Wikileaks Iraq war logs: key findings

https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iraq/8085076/Wikileaks-Iraq-war-logs-key-findings.html

A trove of secret documents released by Wikileaks discloses that the US military routinely turned a blind eye to torture and abuse committed by its Iraqi allies against suspect insurgents.

US apache helicopters killed insurgents who were trying to surrender, according to the logs. An American military legal adviser told helicopter crew that Iraqi men were valid targets as they could not surrender to aircraft, the documents show. The Apache helicopter killed the two insurgents after being told that they were still legitimate targets even although they were offering to lay down their arms.

More than 15,000 previously unrecorded deaths were contained in the files, according to one analysis of the figures. US military logs revealed 109,032 deaths between January 2004 and December last year. Iraq Body Count, the London-based organisation which monitors civilian deaths, concluded that 15,000 unrecorded civilian deaths will be added to the public record.

Pentagon logs detail two cases of alleged abuse by British troops against Iraqi detainees. Two reports dated June 23 2008 describe claims from two Iraqi men – both of them Shias – who alleged they were punched and kicked by unidentified British soldiers. Both men, according to the reports posted on the Wikileaks website, suffered injuries that would have been consistent with their claims. There is no apparent record of an investigation taking place into the allegations.
British soldiers *repeatedly came under attack from US forces* in a series of ‘friendly fire’ incidents. The files disclose that they were attacked in error on at least 11 occasions. In one incident, a commando with the Royal Marines was shot and wounded while, on another occasion at night, US troops, who had no night vision goggles and were listening to their iPods, began firing on a British patrol.

British security agents *were forced to change secret data including codes and signal frequencies* after a helicopter dropped boxes containing sensitive information over Baghdad. The boxes, which included a number of different codes, were allowed to fall from a Puma helicopter flying over Baghdad in April 2006.

**Iran supplied chemical weapons to Iraqi militias** for attacks against civilians and US targets. Iranian rockets with "neuroparalytic" agents were identified as a threat to American and British forces during the war in Iraq, according to reports included in the files.

Iranian-backed forces *supplied insurgents attacking coalition troops* and devised new forms of suicide vests for al-Qaeda, according to Wikileaks assessments. They claim Iranian intelligence officers served inside Iraq, at one point manning checkpoints with local militias, and describe a firefight on the border in which American troops shot an Iranian border guard dead and then came under prolonged attack as they returned to base.

US soldiers *killed innocent Iraqi civilians at road checkpoints*. In one incident, in September 2005, when a car failed to stop they fired warning shots before opening fire with automatic light machine guns, killing a man and a woman and wounding their children.

Iraqi forces *systematically beat and tortured prisoners*, including women and children. The reports described prisoners being shackled, blindfolded and hung by wrists or ankles.

British and American security contractors *contributed to the chaos of war*. A British firm, Aegis, suffered the highest losses of any company, according to analysis by the *New York Times*. 
American troops handed over captives to the infamous 'Wolf Brigade' torture squad, a feared unit controlled by the Iraq ministry of interior.

On Monday, the US military denied the torture claims on Monday, stating it did not “turn a blind eye” to torture or under-report the number of civilian deaths.

3. **The Independent** newspaper

**Huge dossier of secret files shows the US ignored torture of Iraqis**


The reports deliver a devastating verdict on the Coalition's involvement in Iraq including revelations that the American military:

* Knew Iraqi officials were torturing detainees but ruled against intervening.
* Conspired to cover up the deaths of "hundreds" of Iraqi civilians at manned checkpoints.
* Kept records of the number of Iraqi civilians that were being killed, despite famously claiming that the military "didn't do body counts".

The documents also reveal how Iran has provided direct military aid and training to Shia militias behind much of the sectarian bloodletting and attacks on Coalition forces in Baghdad and southern Iraq.

Nearly 400,000 secret documents, an enormous trove of field reports covering more than five years of military involvement in Iraq, have gone online to the consternation of US officials who claim the publication will endanger both soldiers and informants on the ground in Iraq.

The reports show that, despite repeated denials, the US government does indeed have a detailed – though incomplete – list of civilians killed in Iraq with the logs recording 66,081 non-combatant deaths out of a total of 109,000 fatalities.
According to Iraq Body Count, the London-based organisation which began counting Iraqi civilian casualties after the invasion and has been given access to the Wikileaks cache, the logs reveal at least a further 15,000 extra civilian deaths that were previously unknown. They now intend to revise their total estimate for the number of Iraqi civilians killed from 107,000 to at least 122,000. They say that the US military's troops tend to underestimate the number of civilians killed. For instance, in the more than 3,800 airstrikes logged in the Iraq war reports, according to US military figures, just 103 fatalities were civilian.

The secret files, which cover a period from January 2004 to December 2009 and are largely made up of reports from units in the field and military intelligence, reveal that torture has remained widespread within the Iraqi police and army, despite repeated assertions from both the Bush and Obama administrations that they would not tolerate such abuses in an Iraq post-Saddam Hussein.

Over the five years covered by the logs, American troops encountered at least 1,300 instances of Iraqi-on-Iraqi torture, including regular reports of detainees being electrocuted, sodomised with objects and beaten to death. At least six prisoners are reported to have died in custody and there are a number of examples of torture continuing up until very recently.

In August 2009, for instance, an Iraqi detainee committed suicide in prison. The American log of the incident found "found bruises and burns on the detainee's body as well as visible injuries to the head, arm, torso, legs, and neck."

Four months later 12 Iraqi soldiers, including an intelligence officer, were caught on video in Tal Afar shooting to death a prisoner whose hands were tied. It is unclear whether any follow up was made by the US authorities to either instances but Amnesty International claims no Iraqi personnel have been jailed for torture since the invasion. Sexual abuse also appears to be commonly employed against women in Iraqi custody.

Such instances will be a major source of embarrassment to the Obama Administration which campaigned during on ending some of the more notorious human rights abuses committed under his predecessor George W Bush.
The documents also reveal how two secret orders handed down to troops in 2004 and 2005 told soldiers that they should only report instances of abuse by Iraqi officials to their commanders and should not intervene directly. The archive also contains reports on at least four cases of lethal shootings from helicopters and 700 instances if civilians being killed at manned checkpoints.

In February 2007 an Apache helicopter killed two insurgents from a mortar team who were trying to surrender to them after a military lawyer decided that enemies "cannot surrender to aircraft". The same helicopter, which used the call sign Crazyhorse 18, was the subject of a previous leak earlier this year which showed how the two man aircraft killed a group of insurgents, civilians and two reporters from the Reuters news agency.

The field reports, which were never meant to be made public, also shine a spotlight in Iran's involvement in Iraq. US troops were repeatedly warning their commanders that Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Lebanon's Hizbollah were providing Iraqi Shia militias with training, sanctuary and hardware – including rockets, magnetic bombs that can be attached to the underside of cars, and "explosively formed penetrators," a complex type of explosive device that can punch through armour.

Speaking on Al Jazeera last night Wikileaks' founder Julian Assange described the publication of the documents as an "historic" moment. "This is six years of history, the most extraordinary compendium of war that has ever been released during a time of war," he said.

But the release has been severely criticised by the US government.

"This security breach could very well get our troops and those they are fighting with killed," a Pentagon spokesman said yesterday. "Our enemies will mine this information looking for insights into how we operate, cultivate sources and react in combat situations, even the capability of our equipment."