

***BRussells* Tribunal Dossier** **Introduction to the "Salvador option"** **and Iraq's "Death squads" - *PART 4* -**



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- [**Militias and Death Squads: The Occupation Strategy to Divide Iraq, 18 March 2008**](#)

Eman A. Khamas



March 18, 2008

Whether their name is sectarian militias, paramilitary groups, death squads, mercenaries, criminal gangs, rogue elements in the new Iraqi security forces (no matter what they are called or how different they are), it is said they are controlling Iraq now and turning it into a no-man's land. It is said that the American occupation authorities, and their Iraqi agents in the government are helplessly incapable of controlling them. That they are ever stronger, better functioning, and more organized, and that they are consolidating their control over the north and the south of Iraq, making its division a de facto truth.

Operating independently, or as part of the Iraqi government security forces trained and equipped by the US, these gangs have committed the worst of atrocities, five years after the fall of the State of Iraq. They have dismantled the society and the State, robbed the country, kidnapped, brutally tortured and assassinated thousands, drove millions of their houses, terrorized the citizens, the question remains why and how is it possible for them to commit all these crimes, and why there is no investigation or judicial pursuit for them all these year.

The propaganda that preceded the American invasion and accompanied it created a myth that the occupation would do justice to the Shiites and Kurds who were persecuted by the Sunnis in the last regime or even through history, and the word Sunni, even Arab, was connected to the last regime, the Baath, and later to what is called insurgency, terrorism, resistance ...etc. Remember the Sunni Triangle? A new division among the Iraqis was created between those who were supposed to accept the

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occupation because it would serve their interests, and those who rejected it, because it was against their interests. Of course this myth was eventually dispersed, but it created a seed of some kind of segregation by the sectarian parties and the occupation authorities.

From the first days after the American occupation, (then) unknown gangs led mob-raids on the State facilities, the libraries, the museums, destroyed the official documents of the ministries and other institutions, looted and then burned the governmental buildings while the American troops were watching supportively, not to say anything about the buildings which were destroyed by the bombing. They systematically dismantled the industrial infrastructure of Iraq, and sold it as scrap to Iran, and the Iraqi people were too shocked and bewildered to ask what was going on, or why, and took it as chaos due to the absence of authority, they could not imagine that any sectarian militias would do such things...

In the summer of 2003, a newspaper of the same sectarian party was publishing previously prepared lists of names of Iraqi personalities to be assassinated, the lists were also put on the internet. All of them were either high officials in the Iraqi State, or just well known scientists, academics, diplomats, writers, artists...etc. The majority of them were Sunnis.

On the other hand, even before the occupation, hundreds of Iraqis were trained by the American intelligence agency and US army special operatives, somewhere in eastern Europe or in the U.S, to accompany the invading troops as paramilitary units, and help in the counter insurgency war.

These agent units composed the nucleus and the senior officers of the new Iraqi security forces, after the original forces were completely disbanded. The majority of them were Shiites and Kurds, connected to the major parties which were brought to Iraq by the occupation: the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution, the Dawa, the two main Kurdish parties, the Allawi and the Chalabi militias, working under the American supervision.

When the new Iraqi security forces were established in June 2004, they were chosen solely of these militias, specially of the Badr Brigades, the Iranian-trained wing of SCIRI, which constituted the Ministry of Interior commandos, and especially the Wolf Brigades, and the Kurdish Peshmerga. The Sadr militia, known as Jeish Al-Mahdi was "given" the Facilities Protection services, although they joined the police as ranks later in 2005 and specially in 2006. Other commandos brigades, such as the snake, the scorpion, the thunder, the tiger...are just different names for similar forces.

The Peshmerga, however, is a different story. Known as the liberators of Kurdistan, they supported the US occupation troops in 2003, and also in Fallujah. More than 100.000 militia men serving in the security forces of the regional government of Kurdistan. They are abducting thousands of Arabs,

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Turkmen and other minorities from Mosul, Kirkuk, and other hundreds of smaller towns and villages in the north of Iraq, and imprisoning them in many secret prisons, of which only five are known in Suleimaniya, Arbil, Shaqlawa, Dahok, and Aqrah ...and the Peshmerga refuse to admit that. Trained by hundreds of elite Israeli intelligence officers, the Peshmerga four battalions are controlling Mosul, practicing brutal ethnic cleansing in Kirkuk and many other northern towns. They forced 100.000 Arab families out of Kirkuk, again committing different kinds of grave human rights violations. Eye witnesses of a huge explosion in Mosul last January, which killed tens of families and injured hundreds, say that the Peshmerga was behind it.

The Iraqis were shocked by the extremely brutal techniques that the Iraqi police and the American troops were using to track down what they call "insurgency". A woman in her mid sixties was repeatedly raped by 13 Kurdish militiamen in Kirkuk, for example, a whole village was burnt south of Baghdad, its men arrested and tortured and killed because an American convoy was attacked in a place near by... But it is very important to mention here that it was in the interest of both sides (the Americans and their Iraqi agents) that the reputation of extreme brutality was deliberately attributed to the sectarian and ethnic militias, more than to their Americas. On the one hand to provoke the sectarian tensions, and to give the occupation a better humane face. Even after Abu Greib, families were very anxious to know if their sons were arrested by the Americans, not the Iraqi forces!!

Politically, decisions were made to deepen the discrimination sensitivities among the Iraqis: creating a governing council along sectarian and ethnic representation, a constitution draft focusing on the diversity (not the unity) of the Iraqi people and on federalism, the hasty elections and electoral fuss which provoked sectarianism, the decision to do the election for the transitional government in 2004, attacking Fallujah in the name of preparing the ground for the election, but worst of all was Bremer's decision of including the sectarian militias in the security forces, as a way to fight the insurgency and also to find a solution for the private armed militias. Actually, they provided an official cover to the sectarian killings and death squads, giving the militia-loyal policemen, mostly Shiite, the money, training, and the weapon to scourge the other sect. Two years later, the American commander general Petraeus, created yet a new militia, the Awakening councils, of Sunnis who are supposed to fight Al-Qaida, obviously they are a Sunni militia equivalent to the Shiite militias, specially Sadrists. They are supposed to protect their areas were they attacked by other sectarian militias, thus Petraeus planted more seeds for civil war, on grassroots level this time.

Probably the first obvious blow to the social fabric was when these Iraqi sectarian and ethnic troops were used to kill their brothers in Fallujah, and the propaganda that accompanied that. One of the new Iraqi TVs put pictures of some militias dancing a specific local dance of Kurdistan on the bodies of families in Fallujah, refugees running away from the bombing told stories of how the sectarian policemen humiliated their faith and forced them to say bad words against their sacred symbols and

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such absurdities, leading to deepen the divisions.

Interestingly enough, the Iraqis were completely aware of the sectarian game. Demonstrations usually raise slogans against sectarianism. In fact, culturally, the Iraqis used to consider it rather uncivilized or uncouth to ask or to talk about the ones' religious or sectarian affiliations. During the Fallujah attacks Shiite villages and towns took Sunni families in, near Karbala, the heart of Shiism. Shiite young men volunteered to fight with the Sunnis against the Americans in Fallujah. In the bridge stampede which killed about one thousand Shiites in 2005, people talk about a young Sunni, Othman, who managed to save lives of 6 Shiites from drowning, then he drowned of exhaustion and died. A Shiite friend, now, at this moment, is hiding 5 young Sunnis whose lives are threatened...etc.

After the Fallujah massacre, and the atrocities in the prisons of Abu Greib, Bucca, Badush and others, came the transitional government of Al-Jafari (Dawa party), which was very keen on giving the impression of being extremely sectarian and ruthless. A Badr Brigades officer, and a SCIRI senior, Bayan Jabr, was appointed a minister of Interior. He purged the ministry of any Sunni officer. During 2005, horrible stories were coming from different areas of Baghdad and out of the prisons. Families repeatedly talk about tens of young men in uniform and in the interior ministry cars raiding certain neighborhoods, arresting men, who never come back again. When the families ask in the ministry of interior or in the police stations, the officials deny to have anything to do with the raids or to know anything about them.

The bodies of these arrested men are found some days later in remote places, in the garbage, or in the morgue, savagely tortured, executed and mutilated. Their trade marks are eyes torn out, bones and limbs broken, head and chest full of drill holes, burned skin...skin diseases spread due to lack of hygienic atmosphere. Released prisoners talk about notorious conditions inside the over crowded prisons, to the point that the air becomes insufficient... The targets are normally Sunni personalities, especially those well known for defying the occupation. What is really striking and conspicuous was how these thousands of crimes were never investigated, and always ignored by the occupation, and the immunity the police has to do the raids, which normally take hours after midnight, during the curfew, with tens of men and cars, shooting, shouting, without any one noticing what was going on.

The number of these prisoners is unknown, but according to the human rights organizations, they are 160.000-180.000. In this atmosphere operation "Lightening/Thunder" was done, and obviously failed. It was an American-Iraqi joint operation to impose security on Baghdad. What happened was an operation limited to few areas of the capital, with Sunni majority, to clean it of "terrorists" while other areas of Baghdad, well known to be the strong holds of the sectarian militias are exempt of any search. The result was arresting 6 hundreds of men, mainly on sectarian bases.

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When Maliki got the office of prime minister, it took him 5 months to fix a coalition government in 2006 , but he could do that only through a deal with the Sadr militia, giving them 6 ministries of services, and a green light to carry out their sectarian agenda of cleansing the mixed neighborhoods of Baghdad and the surrounding areas, with the police complete complicity, and support. The new minister of interior Jawad Bloani, encouraged the infiltration of the sectarian militias as never before. In the words of the International Crisis Group "the Sadrists controlled new territories, attracted new recruits, accumulated recourses, and infiltrated the police...they were engaged in abhorrent sectarian killings, and restored to plunder and theft...executed untold numbers of Sunnis...merely because they were Sunnis".

Appalling stories began to come out of Iraq, of systematic sectarian cleansing, specially after the bombing of the Samarra Shrine. Tow more joint military operations were conducted in Baghdad in 2006-07. The same scenario was carried out regarding the exemption of the sectarian militias of any pursuit. In the south, however, the situation is different. The struggle is intr-Shiite militias. The Badr brigades are the most powerful and has moved aggressively to control the police in Amara, Diwaniya, and Nassiriya... They are accused of many assassinations of former officers, academics and professionals...other militias want their share of power, specially the Sadr militia and the Fadhila party. Many times, the conflict turned into armed fighting.

Last week, prime minister Maliki ordered that all the Iraqis have to hold their civil status IDs , not their personal or professional IDs, which is a very strange and dangerous decision, given the fact that in the civil Id, it is mentioned the full name of the person, his mothers', his tribe, his religion, his birth place...practically telling his sectarian affiliation, even if he does not believe in it. It is strange and dangerous because Maliki knows very well, and he has admitted it many times that the Iraqi security forces are infiltrated by what he called rogue elements, e.g. sectarian militias, who would use these information to liquidate the other sect.

On the other hand, Maliki knows very well, too, that there are false check points in the streets, specially of Baghdad, made by militias in uniform, and they would use these information to commit all their crimes of assassinations, kidnappings, killings... the question remains why would Maliki offer the militias this great help? On the other hand, at least 18.000 new militia member joined the security forces since the second half of last year, according to many sources.

For the Americans it was very useful this state of terror. Many eye witnesses talk about militias' raids done in daylight, with the American and the Iraqi forces watching and not moving a finger to help the victims. It is illogical that all these thousands of extrajudicial killings, disappearances, illegal raids, illegal check points which kidnap people and kill them, and horrible torture linked to the militias would go unnoticed.

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These militias argue that the Sunni "terrorists", namely al-Qaida, are targeting the Shiite or mixed civilians in crowded areas like market places, bus garages, mosques, other religious gatherings...etc. They were attacked, killing thousands of them, in understandable operations that kill the Iraqis, and does not hurt neither the occupiers, the political parties, nor the resistance...very mysterious and atrocious, specially that no one declares responsibility for them. Again they go uninvestigated or questioned. The question remains who would benefit from these mass killings? And the only logical answer we have is the American occupation itself, or any of the foreign intelligence elements who would benefit from the collapse of Iraq as a unified country.

It is well known now that the war in Iraq is also a mercenary war, there are dozens of thousands of foreign mercenaries, 180.000 hired killers, very beautifully paid by the American government (1000-1500\$ a day) . Supervised by CIA "experts" , Bremer exempted them from having to obey any law, neither the Iraqi, nor the Pentagon. Armed men from Latin America to South Africa to eastern Europe to Asia...outlawed by the Geneva conventions, there they are in tens of thousands. In addition, there thousands of intelligence agents from all over the world, especially U.S., U.K., Israel, Iran. All these military men are not in Iraq for picnic. All serve their own agendas, there are stories by eyewitnesses of strange people and cars being near the place of the explosion which happens immediately after they leave, we have the outrageous story of the two British spies who were caught in Basra, wearing Arabic dresses, their cars heavily loaded with weapons, in the middle of the crowd. We do not know so far who exploded the U.N. headquarter, or the Samarra shrines...But we know that the American authorities in Iraq prevented the result of the investigation of the U.N. explosion to be declared.

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- [**IRAQ: 'US the Biggest Producer of Terror' \(Ahmed Ali, Dahr Jamail 25 Jan 2008\)**](#)

Ahmed Ali and Dahr Jamail*

BAQUBA, Jan 25 (IPS) - Broken promises have brought a dramatic increase in anti-U.S. sentiment across the capital city of Iraq's Diyala province.

Many people in Baquba, capital of Diyala 40 km northeast of Baghdad, had supported U.S. forces when they ousted former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. But failed reconstruction projects and muddled policies mean the U.S. has lost that support.

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"The Americans based their strategy in Iraq on certain Shias here who have direct enmity with Sunnis and allegiance to Iran," resident Ayub Ibrahim told IPS. "This was the source of the gap between certain Shias which the U.S. backs, and certain Sunnis they back." Shias and Sunnis are different sects within Islam.

The U.S. has also alienated people through its policy of extensive detentions. Many believe that raids that lead to arrests are based on motivated information given to the U.S. military by Shia militiamen who have infiltrated the Iraqi army and police.

"We never witnessed an attempt to arrest Shia people either by the U.S. army or the Iraqi police and army," resident Abdul Sattar al-Badri told IPS. Most people see no reasonable basis for many of the arrests.

In November the International Committee of the Red Cross said that around 60,000 people are currently detained in Iraq.

"The Americans occupied our country and put our men in prisons," Dhafir al-Rubaiee, an officer from Iraq's previous army told IPS. "The majority of these prisoners have been arrested for nothing other than for being Sunni. Every one of these prisoners has a family, and these families now have reason to hate Americans."

Others blame the lack of security and the destroyed infrastructure for the increasing anti-U.S. sentiment.

"The lack of security is a direct result of the occupation," resident Abu Ali told IPS. "The Americans crossed thousands of miles to destroy our home and kill our men. They are the reason for all our disasters."

Another resident, speaking on condition of anonymity added, "We lived in need during the period of the Saddam government, but we were safe. We were compelled to work sometimes 20 hours a day to earn our living, but we were happy to see our children and relatives together." U.S. forces, he said, have ended all that.

Abu Tariq believes the U.S. military intentionally destroyed Iraq's infrastructure. "The Americans destroyed the electricity, water pumping stations, factories, bridges, highways, hospitals, schools, buildings, and opened the borders for strangers and terrorists to get easily into the country," he said.

The large number of Iraqis killed by U.S. forces has also hardly endeared the forces to the people.

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"When targeted by a roadside bomb or suicide bomber, U.S. soldiers shoot at people randomly. Innocent civilians have been killed or injured," Yaser Abdul-Rahman, a 45-year-old schoolmaster told IPS. "Thousands of people have been killed like this."

The anti-U.S. sentiment in Baquba is now so high that people no longer hide their distrust of the U.S.

"At the beginning of the occupation, the people of Iraq did not realise the U.S. strategy in the area," Abu Taiseer, a member of the communist party in the city told IPS. "Their strategy is based on destruction and massacre. They do anything to have their agenda fulfilled."

"Now, Iraqis know that behind the U.S. smile is hatred and violence," Taiseer added. "They call others violent and terrorists, but what they are doing in Iraq and in other countries is the origin and essence of terror. America is the biggest producer of terror, and they spend huge funds for creating and training death squads all over the world."

Despite the differing U.S. ways of dealing with Shias and Sunnis, the two sects seem one in their hatred of the U.S.

"Look at our country, it will need 30 years to get back again," Edan Barham told IPS. "This has nothing to do with sects; all of us are Iraqis, and we should think of Iraq in a better way than sectarian lines."

"People of Iraq of all sects now realise that it is the occupation represented by the Americans that has damaged the country," resident Khalil Ibrahim said.

Political analyst Azhar al-Teengane says the only Iraqis who support the occupation are those benefiting directly from it.

"The occupation is good for politicians who have made money, militiamen, contractors and opportunists," Teengane said. "These form not more than 5 percent of Iraqi people."

Self-rule could help lower anti-U.S. sentiment, said resident Jalal al-Tae. "In order to improve the situation, the U.S. army should let the people of this city run it."

(*Ahmed, our correspondent in Iraq's Diyala province, works in close collaboration with Dahr Jamail, our U.S.-based specialist writer on Iraq who has reported extensively from Iraq and the Middle East)
(END/2008)

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- [A gripping story, and another story yet to be told \(25 Jan 2008\)](#)

Arablins

January 25, 2008

The gist of Mark Perry's spellbinding [two-part article in the AsiaTimes online](#) (as far as Iraq itself is concerned) is this: Starting in 2003, US military officers on the ground started meeting with, and trying to work out cooperative arrangements with, Iraqis who needed help in fighting off the Wahhabi fundamentalists aka AlQaeda who were flooding the country after the fall of Saddam.

The efforts of these officers were opposed by the White House. Finally in 2005 one such cooperative effort went ahead anyway, involving cooperation between a Marine unit and Sunni leaders fighting AlQaeda in Falluja. That example of cooperation, with the support of "a tight circle of Pentagon civilian advisers around Rumsfeld", was eventually made the model for the Awakening Council strategy in Anbar province. A later attempt to expand this to areas south of Baghdad ran into trouble when a bomb blast at a meeting at the Mansour Hotel in the GreenZone killed many of that scheme's tribal supporters. But the strategy went ahead, including in Babil province, where the provincial government is Shiite, and including also an agreement with the multi-area Janabi tribe.

So the general approach is continuing, but at same time, this brings with it the realization that (1) If it is a sound strategy, even for the short term, then there was no reason not to have implemented it five years ago; and (2) If the best available strategy now seems to be to ally with Iraqi nationalists fighting AlQaeda, and this could have been implemented five years ago, but for the White House ideologues, this raises the next level of questions, or as Mark Perry puts it, continuing his summary of the thinking of the military officers involved:

All of which raises the question of whether the United States should have invaded Iraq in the first place, an issue that is becoming more pertinent to military officers who view the American adventure in Iraq as a political and military failure.

In a nutshell, from the military-operations point of view, the learning curve has been this: (1) The White House opposed any and all deals with Iraqi leaders even if it meant joining hands with Iraqis to fight AlQaeda; (2) now that White House opposition to that strategy has been reversed, and the strategy is showing dramatic short-term results, the question they are raising is this: Why not have done that initially, and in fact, if the key was to ally with Iraqis in fighting AlQaeda, why did we invade in order to fight these people in the first place?

I have left out, in this account of Mark Perry's story, a lot of the detail and the color, and I have also left out all of the extremely interesting intra-military debates, and for that there is no alternative but to

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read the articles from beginning to end, and carefully, a couple of times, to let the enormity of what has been done to the American military really sink in. It is a colossal story in itself.

But back to the question of recent Iraqi history. I have some comments on the story of how American strategy has played out in Iraq, as a result of a year and a half of reading accounts of this from the Arab-press side. In a nutshell:

Perry tells of obstruction from the White House (Bremer, Rice, and others) to deals of any kind with the Sunni tribes in the period from 2003 to 2005 or -06. Then deals of that type started being okayed. This is presented as essentially a case of obstruction by ignorant ideologues, eventually overcome in a process that could be called a victory for practical common-sense, or some such expression. Perry's story includes no particular motivation for the change to the Awakening strategy. It was merely that the merits of the idea gradually came to be unarguable.

The prevailing Iraqi view of this is quite different. American strategy starting in 2003 was to use Shiite groups to harass the remnants of the Baath regime and their sympathizers (aka the Iraqi national resistance, but which was and is in fact much broader than that), and anyone shooting at US troops was either in that class or AlQaeda. Hence the logic of the "no deals" prohibition. Then at some time in 2005 or 2006, partly in the face of growing disaffection on the part of the Saudis and others, and partly from concern about Maliki's ties to Tehran, there had to be a tilt to the Sunnis, hence the decision to enlist Sunni groups, in order to, among other things, act as a counterweight to the sectarian Shiite power. In other words, so far this has been a two-act occupation, first helping Shiites harass Sunnis, then in a second stage helping Sunnis deter Shiites. There are many provisos and nuances, but essentially this is the Iraqi story: This was from the beginning a sectarian strategy, with a shift sometime in 2005 or -06 from anti-Sunni/pro-Shiite to anti-Shiite/pro-Sunni, in terms of the overall weight of American military influence. The weight of the American alliances shifted, but this had nothing to do with "learning about Iraq", and everything to do with keeping the divide-and-conquer ball rolling.

The fact that there was a learning-curve-type struggle to okay *this particular form of a tilt to the Sunnis* doesn't mean that the tilt to the Sunnis "just happened". There is an ongoing US policy, which is a sectarian policy, and in the carrying out of that policy, this Awakening Council strategy was obviously seen as the way forward. There are two stories here: The story of the officers' struggles to get common-sense policies okayed; and the story of the sectarian US policy. They are two different stories. Mark Perry has given us a lot of the first story from the point of view of the common-sense of the officers on the ground. But the second story, from the point of view of the common sense of Iraqis, hasn't sunk in at all as far as the anglosphere is concerned.

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And the reason why the two stories don't easily fit together is this: In the American mind, there was never any concept of Iraq, or of fighting in Iraq, other than the sectarian one. "Iraq" was always "Sunna versus Shiia". So any strategy, or any concepts at all respecting the country, had to start from one side or the other. Why this has been the case is another story, but it is a fact. And consequently, the idea of allying with "Iraqis"--even if it meant in a common fight against the Wahhabi fundamentalists--wasn't on. It would have meant allying with "Sunnis", at a time when we were trying to help the underdog "Shia" get out from under their yoke. It was one against the other; there was no concept of an "Iraqi".

And as Mark Perry points out, once people in the military realized that they could profitably ally with Sunni tribes in defending against AlQaeda, this immediately started to bring down the whole ideological house of cards: (1) Some Iraqis care about their country as a whole, and (2) why exactly did we take these same people to be our enemy in the first place. Not that good for morale, Perry notes.

I am sure that the story Mark Perry tells is exactly what happened, from the vantage-point of the US military officers on the ground in Iraq and those responsible for them. And as I said, the effects of this on the US military are a story that bears a couple of careful readings, a period of reflection, and then another reading. Because perhaps on the third reading you will begin to ask yourself why this story has taken so long to be told.

But from the point of view of Iraq, it isn't the whole story, and I don't think it is necessarily even the most important part of the story from their point of view.

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- [The Boys from Baghdad: Iraqi Commandos Trained by U.S. Contractor, 20 Sept 2007](#)

by Pratap Chatterjee, Special to CorpWatch
September 20th, 2007

“Starting the month with a bang, the boys from Baghdad executed two baited ambushes ... and further confirmed the [Emergency Response Unit’s] ability to conduct operations with stealth and violence of action,” writes an unofficial historian for the ERU, in Unit History of 1st Battalion, a report obtained by CorpWatch. (1)

The “boys” that the report praises are members of one of dozens of elite Iraqi commandos units that function as a “third force” to augment the Iraqi police and army, both of which are widely

considered to be failures. On this mission in early July 2005, the Emergency Response Unit, backed by the First Battalion of the Fifth Infantry Regiment of the U.S. Army, had detained “anti-Iraqi forces” and intercepted roadside bombs.

Their tactics owed much to a secretive U.S. private contractor, U.S. Investigations Services (USIS), which conducted ERU trainings on U.S. military bases in Iraq -- including at Camp Dublin and Camp Solidarity. The trainings began under General David Petraeus as an effort to bolster security in Iraq, and soon evolved into a system for providing support to the deeply sectarian Ministry of the Interior.

Beginning in May 2004, U.S. authorities contracted with USIS to create the first ERU. The non-sectarian force is supposed “to respond to national-level law enforcement emergencies. The four-week training runs recruits through SWAT-type emergency response training focusing on terrorist incidents, kidnappings, hostage negotiations, explosive ordnance, high-risk searches, high-risk assets, weapons of mass destruction, and other national-level law enforcement emergencies” according to the Pentagon.



Cartoon by Khalil Bendib

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Who Owns USIS?

For the first 11 years of its existence as a private company USIS was owned by the Carlyle Group. In May 2007 USIS was sold again to Providence Equity Partners (PEP) for \$1.5 billion. The Rhode Island private equity group specializes in media, entertainment and communications companies. PEP's most famous acquisition was the purchase of Clear Channel's television network. (41)

The top advisor to PEP is Michael Powell, a former policy advisor to Dick Cheney, when Cheney was U.S. Secretary of Defense. But Powell is better known for two other reasons: He is the son of Colin Powell, a former secretary of state and chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the highest military position in the Department of Defense. Michael Powell's other claim to fame was that when George W. Bush appointed Colin Powell secretary of state, the president chose Michael to be chairman of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). There he presided over the deregulation that allowed Clear Channel to acquire the television stations in a way that would have been previously illegal. (42)

Two years after Michael Powell resigned from the FCC, his client, PEP, bought up the very same television stations.

By April 2006, the ERUs had conducted 117 "Close Target Reconnaissance" missions in Baghdad alone, completing 104 of them, and capturing 236 "suspects," according to estimates by Lieutenant Colonel Jeffrey Voss, military advisor in charge of the ERU program.

The ERUs are now officially controlled and paid by the Iraqi Ministry of Interior and are accompanied by U.S. trainers or soldiers throughout their training. But a high-level State Department report issued in 2005 explains that the Iraqi commandos were initially rejected by the very Ministry of the Interior that they were intended to support when they were created more than three years ago. Instead, U.S. officials and contractors controlled the ERUs, which became an unofficial Iraqi face to provide local cover for U.S. operations. With no support from the Iraqi government at the time, the ERU had to rely on USIS for salaries, thereby becoming a privately financed militia.

Michael John, a spokesperson for USIS, told CorpWatch that the company is still under contract with the Pentagon for ERU training, but says that the support is provided strictly as part of training. "We are in a training and not in an operational capacity. The National Police Support Team (NPST) operates under the jurisdiction of Iraq's Ministry of Interior and the U.S. Department of Defense."

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Dozens of interviews conducted by CorpWatch with high-ranking military and government officials over the past 12 months suggest that even at the level of Petraeus's staff, few appeared to know the specific role and scope of ERU activity. What is clear is that the ERU is just one of at least six different U.S. "security" training programs worth over \$20 billion that a variety of U.S. agencies have provided to the many factions in Iraq. (See accompanying boxes for examples of other programs.)

It is becoming increasingly clear that such training programs may be causing or at least exacerbating civil war. Part of the blame lies within the complex failures of the U.S. occupation and part with the loyalties and skills of the forces recruited into the myriad security training programs that are associated with different ministries and thus with different, and often rival, political factions.

"Of course, they are fucking things up," Robert Young Pelton, author of "Licensed to Kill, Hired Guns in the War on Terror" told CorpWatch. "Because the U.S. is arbitrarily putting weapons and power in the hands of those who choose to fight, rather than those who are in the moral right," (2) explaining that few who sign up have any previous law enforcement credentials.

The Third Force

The fact that neither the Iraqi army nor the police were able to tackle the growing insurgency became glaringly obvious in April 2004 when violent uprisings exploded across the country. Iraqi soldiers assigned to fight in Fallujah fled the field. (3) A group of Baghdad police, sent to assist U.S. soldiers battling the Mahdi army in Najaf at the same time, also refused to fight. (4)

Special Police Commandos

The ERUs are not the only "third force" police commandos trained in Iraq under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. The Special Police Commandos, a SWAT team that has been often described as death squads, also have unofficial U.S. "advisors." (Unlike the Anbar militias described below, the Special Police Commandos are not trained by USIS, but are a separate force, albeit working for the same ministry.) The commandos were first composed of veterans of Hussein's special forces and Republican Guard, and headed up by Adnan Thabit, the nephew of Falah al-Naqib, the interior minister under the interim government of Ayad Allawi that followed Paul Bremer. The commandos quickly became notorious after a nationally televised reality show featured them brutally interrogating suspected "terrorists." (21)

"In one show, a former policeman with two black eyes confessed to killing two police officers in

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was delivered to them," wrote Peter Maass, a *New York Times* journalist who first detailed the role of the Special Police Commandos in May 2005. Maass also documented several cases he personally encountered in which the commandos abused prisoners. (22)

Maass also noted the potential for the commandos to become enmeshed in sectarian killings, observing that Allawi, Naqib and Thabit are all Sunni.

"Paramilitary forces have a tendency to become politicized ... [and] used for internal combat," wrote Maass. "In a country as riven as Iraq -- with Shiites, Sunnis, Kurds and Turkmen vying for power -- a paramilitary force that is controlled by one faction can be a potent weapon against others. That is why the commandos are a conundrum -- in the country's unstable military and political landscape, it is impossible to know where they are heading."

Weeks after Maass' article appeared, his words would seem prophetic. In May 2005, Allawi was replaced by Jaafari, a conservative religious Shiite from Islamic Dawa Party, in the first elected government. Bayan Jabr, a former high-ranking member of the Iranian-backed Badr Brigade, the military arm of the fundamentalist Shiite Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), took over as interior minister in Iraq's transitional government.

Each commando unit had a nickname such as the Scorpions, Snakes and Tigers. One particularly notorious group, led by General Gharrawi, was the Wolf Brigade, later renamed the Volcanoes. (23) A U.S. Department of State report recounts an August 2005 incident in which about 50 men suspected of being Volcanoes raided the Al Huriya neighborhood in northern Baghdad, kidnapped 36 Sunnis and killed them. Acid was used to burn their faces before they were shot in the head. (24)

Under Jabr, the Special Police Commandos were taken over by two generals, Rasheed Fleyah and Mahdi Sabeh, both Shiites. In November 2005, American troops discovered 169 beaten, whipped and starved prisoners (most of whom were Sunni) at the Al-Jadiriya bunker, a secret detention center run by the country's Interior Ministry. One of these victims, Jamal Hamdani, was left impotent and paralyzed on one side of his body after repeated electrocution of his spine and genitals during two months in detention in a secret prison in Kadhamiya, Baghdad. An electric drill had been used on his chin. (25)

Six months later, in May 2006, a similar center was found in Hilla, where some victims had holes drilled into their bodies. Then, as many as 1,400 torture victims were discovered at Site Four in east Baghdad under the control of the Wolf Brigade. Jabr later admitted that torture had taken

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place in both Al-Jadiriya and Site Four.

U.S. military officials declared themselves surprised. "I did not see militia groups in the Special Police Commandos in the time I was there," General David Petraeus, the man in charge of security training for Iraqis until September 2005, told a Frontline documentary team in late 2006.(26) (Petraeus was appointed the commander in chief of all U.S. troops in Iraq in January 2007.)

When the current government of Nouri al-Maliki took charge in April 2006, the Special Police Commandos were officially disbanded, merged with the ERU, and renamed the National Police.(27) In October 2006 the new Minister of the Interior, Jawad al-Bolani dismissed Fleyah and Sabeh, but the rumors of death squads run out of the Interior Ministry persist.(28)

It should be noted that as each new political group takes control of the Interior Ministry and receive U.S. training, it creates new fiefdoms inside the bureaucracy that never disappear but instead support rival militias that exacerbate rather than resolve the sectarian conflict. A recent Los Angeles Times article explains that each floor of the 11-story headquarters of the ministry is now occupied by a different faction (most of whom are Shiite) working under the U.S. advisors stationed directly above them on the top floor.(29)

U.S. planners in Iraq were suddenly forced to admit that the country was on the verge of spreading insurrections and looming civil war. Officials at the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), headed by Paul Bremer, began earnest discussions about creating a "third force" (5) of highly trained commando units that would be able to deal with hostage situations and unforeseen criminal or political violence. (In a monograph on the evolution of Iraq's security forces, Andrew Rathmell of the Rand Corporation, a think-tank closely affiliated with the Pentagon, defined the third force as "constabulary forces that lie somewhere between civilian police and armed forces.")

Senior U.S. advisors at the Iraqi Ministry of Interior, notably State Department official Steve Casteel, supported the creation of this third force. A former senior U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration official, Casteel previously helped train government forces in Peru, Bolivia and Colombia, where he was involved in the hunt for Pablo Escobar, head of the Medellin cocaine cartel.(6)

Ministry of Interior advisors drew up plans for an Emergency Response Unit consisting of three companies of 60 men each, plus a headquarters unit to do high-risk search, arrest, hostage rescue, and crisis response operations. Once trained, these units were to be integrated into the regular Iraqi Police Service. The advisors also planned similar elite units, Bureau of Dignitary Protection (BDP), to protect

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high-ranking Iraqi officials who were under threat of kidnapping. A total of 370 ERU and 395 BDU personnel were trained in the initial phase and deployed in counter-insurgency operations in Baghdad.(7)

This early ERU training was conducted under a \$64.5 million no-bid contract issued in May 2004(10) to U.S. Investigations Services (USIS), a former federal agency that started out conducting background investigations for civil service personnel.(11) At first, the CPA officials who controlled the purse strings of the Iraqi Ministry of Finance, used oil revenues to finance the contract. Today, the USIS contract, which has been renewed twice, is paid for with Pentagon (and thus U.S. taxpayer) funds.(12) Most of the trainers are retired military personnel plus a few police officers and federal agents.

U.S. control was further enhanced by conducting the trainings at U.S. military bases. At Camp Dublin, near the Baghdad International Airport, new ERU recruits were expected to live alongside their USIS trainers. The four- to eight-week trainings took place at a special facility inside Dublin that was built on a bare plot of land by First Kuwaiti, a contractor that later won the bid to build the U.S. embassy in Baghdad.(13)

USIS also trains ERUs at Camp Solidarity (originally dubbed Camp Gunslinger) in the Sunni neighborhood of Aadhamiya.(14)

Greg (not his real name) worked in a team of 45 USIS trainers based at Camp Dublin to teach ERU recruits skills such as weapons use, close-quarter battle tactics, and forced entry into buildings through doors and windows. "We want to develop a unit of the Iraqi military that can take care of their own problems internally. It's not publicized a lot for whatever reason, but it is true that we are doing that," he told the Detroit Metro Times newspaper.(15)

Once trained, the ERUs were quickly dispatched to "lead" counter-insurgency operations beside U.S. forces, often in combat zones. "They conduct their missions with us on the sidelines," Lieutenant Voss, the ERU program head, told The Advisor, a newspaper published by the U.S. military security training program in Baghdad.(16)

USIS

U.S. Investigations Services traces its origins back to 1883 as a part of the federal government's Civil Service Commission (CSC). (8) Tasked with checking backgrounds of prospective government employees, CSC evolved into the Investigations Service arm of the Office of Personnel Management. In 1996, the Clinton administration privatized this office, purportedly to save money, and sold it for \$545

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million to the Carlyle Group and the New York investment firm of Welsh, Carson, Anderson, and Stowe.(37) Ten years after the sale, USIS, a private company, has a near monopoly on “screening transactions,” conducting some 20 million a year, roughly 90 percent of the total.(38)

The contract to provide commando training in Iraq was a departure for USIS, which had no previous involvement in security training. And it was just the first of several government projects that USIS took over from federal agencies. In September 2006, USIS won a contract to provide the staffing for around-the-clock watch operations at towers erected by Boeing in the Arizona desert to monitor the Mexican border for the U.S. government. Its task is “to detect, identify, classify, and respond to and resolve illegal entry attempts at our land borders with Mexico and Canada.”(39) Although USIS will not take the place of the Border Patrol agents, who are federal employees, the Virginia-based company plays a role in the selection of agents through its contract to do background checks on them. (see [“Fencing the Border: Boeing's High-Tech Plan Falters”](#))

A year later, in July 2007, USIS won a contract to provide the data, software and analysts to track the estimated 550,000 “fugitive aliens” in the U.S.(40)

Disowned and Criticized

USIS's ERU training program ran into problems from its first days in Iraq during the caretaker government of Ayad Allawi, who took charge in July 2004. Iraqi government officials refused to recognize the ERU graduates or to pay them salaries on a regular basis. This stance led to conflicts with U.S. government officials, who believed ERU trainees should be integrated into the police force, according to a critical July 2005 report from the Inspector General of the U.S. State Department.(17)

Rejected by Baghdad, the ERU became an adjunct of the U.S. military, relying on the U.S. Special Forces for operational intelligence. At one point, when the ERU salaries were five months in arrears, USIS started to pay its recruits a \$75 monthly salary.(18)

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DynCorp Police Training

The rank-and-file of Iraq's police also undergo training and mentorship from a private company -- some 700 trainers working for DynCorp, a Virginia-based corporation.⁴³ DynCorp also employs 377 people to train police in Afghanistan.⁽⁴⁴⁾ For its training and security work in the two countries in fiscal years 2004, 2005 and 2006, the company received \$1.6 billion, which accounted for roughly 30 percent of its revenue during those years.⁽⁴⁵⁾

The Iraq program was first issued to DynCorp as a no-bid contract in April 2003 and renewed in September 2006.⁽⁴⁶⁾ The latest contract, which expired at the end of May 2007, is currently up for bid. The Special Inspector General for Iraqi Reconstruction, an independent U.S. government agency, criticized DynCorp for overspending on the building of training facilities -- such as \$43.8 million for a residential camp in Baghdad for trainers that has never been used.⁽⁴⁷⁾

A 2006 Pentagon and State Department investigation into the police training program in Afghanistan revealed that managers had no idea how many police officers were actually on duty or what became of thousands of trucks and other equipment issued to police units.⁽⁴⁸⁾ The report concludes that the police were largely incapable of carrying out routine law enforcement work. While the report investigators do not blame DynCorp directly, Afghan officials have complained about the poor quality of trainers and their high salaries.

Ali Jalali, a military historian who served as Afghanistan's interior minister from 2002 to 2005, told the *New York Times*: "They were good on patrols in Oklahoma City, Houston, or Miami. But not in a country where you faced rebuilding the police force."⁽⁴⁹⁾

Others say the same -- that DynCorp's Iraq training has also been a wasted effort. "It is my professional opinion that the police training program in Iraq has been a complete failure," said Gerald Burke, a retired Massachusetts police major who worked as an adviser to Iraq's Ministry of Interior for two years, when he testified before the U.S. Congress House of Representatives Armed Services Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations in April 2007.⁽⁵⁰⁾

Another source of conflict between Baghdad and Washington centered around how to define the pool of potential trainees. The State Department report recommended that trainers should draw recruits from within the existing police force, in order to make the ERUs more palatable to the Iraqi government. When the first elected government took over in May 2005, al-Jafaari's administration agreed to integrate the ERU and BDP units into the Ministry of the Interior.⁽¹⁹⁾ However the training continued to be conducted separately from the regular police program contracted to Virginia-based

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DynCorp (see box).

The ERU initial training also came under fire for alleged human rights abuses. In the spring of 2005, Colonel Ted Westhusing, a military ethics expert from Oklahoma who was in charge of the USIS contract, received an anonymous four-page letter accusing USIS of deliberately reducing the number of trainers to increase its profit margin. Westhusing was supervising the ERU program at the time. The letter, which was eventually released to Texas journalist Robert Bryce earlier this year under the Freedom of Information Act, detailed two incidents in which USIS contractors allegedly witnessed or participated in killing Iraqis during the assault on Fallujah in 2004. "ERU Mentors [USIS contractors] are conducting real world ops [operations]. They shot their weapons and killed Iraqis," wrote the whistle-blower. "(Name deleted) was telling me how many Iraqis he had killed until I told him to shut the hell up. I was appalled by this. I have talked to the Mentors and am told that if they don't go with the Iraqis the Iraqis won't fight."

Worried that "it would put his contract at risk," an unnamed USIS manager did not report the accusations to the U.S. military supervisors according to a November 2005 investigative article by T. Christian Miller in the Los Angeles Times.(20)

On receipt of the letter, Westhusing reported the allegations to his superiors, but told them that he believed USIS was complying with the terms of its contract. U.S. officials investigated and found "no contractual violations," and "these allegations to be unfounded."

But over the next few months Westhusing became increasingly dissatisfied with the company. In June 2005, he attended a meeting in Iraq in which he angrily complained of "his dislike of the contractors, [who] were paid too much money by the government," according to Miller's sources.

Shortly after Westhusing had left the meeting, a USIS employee discovered the colonel lying on the floor in a trailer in a pool of blood, a single gunshot wound to the head. A note discovered by the body, in Westhusing's handwriting, pointed to suicide: "I cannot support a msn [mission] that leads to corruption, human rights abuse and liars. I am sullied," it says. "I came to serve honorably and feel dishonored. Death before being dishonored any more."

"Equipping Iraqis for Civil War"

USIS training continues today under a new contract issued earlier this year, although few details have been made public. Occasionally the Pentagon's public affairs office publishes short descriptions of ERU missions. A July 21, 2007 press release, for example, describes one group, accompanied the previous day by U.S. military advisors, that "detained three suspected members of a rogue Jaysh al-Mahdi militia group." Also known as the Mahdi Army, the militia is led by the powerful and popular

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Shia leader, Moqtada al-Sadr, and is based in Sadr City, the poor Shia neighborhood in northwestern Baghdad. (30)

Such raids are fraught with problems: The perception that the U.S. or the Iraqi government is backing raids on groups with popular support and parliamentary representation, such as the Mahdi Army, could fuel civil war.

Indeed some fear that U.S.-trained militias, rather than adding security, are already exacerbating sectarian strife. "We have been going about pumping out so many individuals with weapons, with uniforms, that my greatest fear is that in our effort to train and equip the Iraqi security forces, what we have been doing is equipping Iraqis for civil war," Matt Sherman, a civilian advisor to Iraq's Interior ministry, told Frontline. (35)

"It is like raising a crocodile," Saad Yousef al-Muttalibi, told the Washington Times when asked about the various "third force" training schemes. The Al-Maliki cabinet member, who is in charge of negotiating reconciliation agreements, continued: "It is fine when it is a baby, but when it is big, you can't keep it in the house." (36)

Others point out that these trainings are a throwback to colonial divide-and-conquer techniques. "The ERUs represent a return to not only the old Special Forces/CIA counterinsurgency model [fighting fire with fire], but the older British model of sepoy or local fighters paid strictly to bolster foreign forces with little if any concern about the local power balance. The same recipe was used in Afghanistan, Latin America and other proxy wars," Robert Young Pelton told CorpWatch.

Anbar Awakening

The term "Emergency Response Unit" has also been used for various schemes that arm and equip local militias to fight Al Qaeda in Iraq under the auspices of the Ministry of the Interior. For example, some 2,500 men have been trained under such a scheme in Anbar province and another 800 in Babil province in the past year. (9)

But Lieutenant Colonel Michael Meese, an advisor to General David Petraeus, told CorpWatch that U.S. Special Forces were in charge of these ERU training schemes around the country, noting that they were different from the USIS training scheme at Camps Dublin and Solidarity.

Petraeus has personally lent his support by attending an ERU graduation ceremony in Hilla this past June.

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The most widely touted example of U.S. Special Forces-trained ERU deployment has been in Anbar province, the vast western desert province that borders Jordan, Syria and Saudi Arabia, where Al Qaeda in Iraq and various sectarian forces are currently attacking Maliki government and occupation troops. In September 2006 Sheikh Abdul Sattar al-Rishawi, head of the Anbar Salvation Front, joined hands with the U.S. (31) The enemy-of-my-enemy alliance served al-Rishawi in various ways: It helped him fight off Al Qaeda of Iraq's attempt to undermine his tribal power, and it procured special training for his followers.

All told some 2,500 al-Rishawi supporters received U.S. Special Forces-provided ERU training. Touting Anbar's declining violence, including carjackings and bombings, the U.S. military and even Al-Maliki hailed the "Anbar Awakening" as a major step forward in combating "terrorism."

Al-Maliki made a much publicized trip to Ramadi, the provincial capital, in a show of support and solidarity with Al-Rishawi in March. Indeed it was his first trip to the city in 30 years and reporters were invited along to witness the new militias.

Monte Morin, a military reporter with the *Stars and Stripes* described an ERU he witnessed in Ramadi. "The units, which are armed but wear no standardized uniforms, have been issued pickup trucks and, in some cases, night-vision goggles. They draw pay from the Iraqi Ministry of Interior."

Like the USIS-trained ERU, these militias are backed up by the U.S. military. Morin described how Colonel Mohammed Rashid (an ex-Baathist), was put in charge of an ERU to patrol the 50-square-mile Jazeera suburb, beside the 1st Battalion of the 36th Infantry Regiment and the 1st Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division of the U.S. Army. (32)

Some say that providing ERU training to groups such as the Anbar Salvation Council is a dangerous game, given the council's history and the U.S. record of training groups such as the Afghan resistance that later turn their weapons and skills back on the U.S.

Lieutenant Colonel Richard Welch, a U.S. Army reserve officer in Baghdad who specializes in tribal and religious affairs, told the *Washington Post* that Al-Rishawi "made his living running a band of thieves who kidnapped and stopped and robbed people on the road between Baghdad and Jordan." (34) (This may help explain why violent robberies and bombings decreased when the Anbar Salvation Council took charge.)

Then there is the question of loyalty. "The question with a group like [the Anbar Salvation Council] always is, does it stay bought?" Anthony Cordesman, a military analyst at the Center for Strategic

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and International Studies in Washington, told the *Washington Post*.

The Anbar success has been short-lived. In June, a suicide bomber blew himself up inside the Mansour hotel in Baghdad, killing a number of the sheikhs affiliated with the Anbar Salvation Council. In the last three months support for the group has crumbled. (33) Al-Rishawi himself was killed in a bomb attack on September 13, 2007, a week after meeting with President George Bush.

This article was made possible by a generous grant from the Hurd Foundation. It is the third in a series on the failure of reconstruction in Iraq. The first article, on healthcare in Iraq, may be read here: <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=14290>, and the second, on oil metering, may be read at <http://www.corpwatch.org/article.php?id=14427>. To contact the author, e-mail pratap@corpwatch.org

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- [Meet Gen. David Petraeus: His Militia Strategy Plunged Iraq Into a Civil War. And Now He's Back for More \(A.K. Gupta 12 Sep 2007\)](#)



[Global Research](#), September 12, 2007

Gen. David H. Petraeus, the scholar-warrior tapped by Bush to salvage the U.S. war in Iraq, is settling in for the long war.

Having assumed command of all U.S. forces in Iraq earlier this year, Petraeus warns the war is not "going to be resolved in a year or even two years." In fact, he predicts that the counterinsurgency effort could last "at least nine or 10 years."

Petraeus is overseeing the escalation of 30,000 more troops, bringing U.S. troop levels to 155,000, near the highest levels of the whole war. (This has been matched by a big spike in American deaths with 126 in May alone, also near the highest levels.)

With a Ph.D. from Princeton University, he exemplifies the new breed of warrior who combines scholarly insight, cultural understanding and steely determination. Despite his high profile, Petraeus' record has largely escaped scrutiny. If any one general symbolizes the failure that is Iraq, it is Petraeus. Having served in multiple positions in Iraq since the 2003 invasion, Petraeus bears enormous responsibility for the Iraq debacle. And he hasn't seemed to have learned anything as he is replicating policies that deepened the quagmire in the first place.

Petraeus is green-lighting the funding and arming of Sunni militias in strife-wracked Al Anbar province for the stated purpose of routing Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia. But it is also part of the Bush administration's overall Middle East strategy.

Petraeus and the White House are forming Sunni militias apparently as a counterweight to Shiite militias and parties that it helped bring to power in Iraq and which they see as an Iranian fifth column.

THE IRANIAN HAND

Wherever the Bush administration looks in the Middle East, it sees an Iranian hand. This was not how it was supposed to be. Prior to the invasion of Iraq, neo-cons were crowing that "the road to Tehran runs through Baghdad." In the Gaza Strip, The White House labels Hamas an Iranian proxy; ditto for

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Hizbullah in Lebanon. In Iraq, it describes various Shiite forces as in thrall to Iran's mullahs. In Afghanistan, it charges that Iranian weapons are flowing to the Taliban.

Its obsession has become self-fulfilling, turning these separate wars into a regional clash of Sunni versus Shiite. Even with Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon and Palestine locked in conflict and the spillover threatening to drag in neighboring countries, White House operatives are itching for the biggest fight of them all: a war against Iran.

END RUN

Steven Clemmons of thewashingtonnote.com wrote in late May of how Vice President Cheney and his staff were planning an "end run strategy" around Bush by colluding with Israel to launch a small-scale attack against Iran in the hopes it would strike back at U.S. forces in the Persian Gulf and ignite a full-blown war. Part of the strategy is to have neo-conservatives push publicly for war. John Bolton recently pronounced, "Regime change or the use of force are the only available options to prevent Iran from getting a nuclear weapons capability." And Commentary editor Norman Podhoretz fired his shot in an article entitled, "The Case for Bombing Iran."

Former U.S. Ambassador to Israel Martin Indyk told Seymour Hersh, "The White House is not just doubling the bet in Iraq. It's doubling the bet across the region." Hersh writes that this amounts to a "new strategy" termed a "redirection." It's bringing "the United States closer to an open confrontation with Iran and, in parts of the region, propelled it into a widening sectarian conflict between Shiite and Sunni Muslims." He adds, "A by-product of these activities has been the bolstering of Sunni extremist groups that espouse a militant vision of Islam and are hostile to America and sympathetic to Al Qaeda."

This is the situation in Iraq.

THE PETRAEUS FILES

In June 2004, Petraeus took the assignment of organizing training for all Iraqi military and police forces following their collapse during the Shiite and Sunni uprisings two months earlier.

During this period he was instrumental in forming government-sponsored militias throughout Iraq that operate as anti-Sunni death squads to this day, and which have plunged the nation into civil war. In the fall of 2004, Petraeus was arming, equipping and funding the Special Police Commandos, calling them "a horse to back."

Petraeus said he aided them because, "I want to get the hell out of here."

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But rather than taking over the fight, the commandos (renamed the national police) have become another side in the war, operating as Shiite-run death squads. By early 2005 the 10,000-strong Special Police Commandos were reportedly disappearing, torturing and murdering Sunni men. Investigative reports detailed scores of incidents in which Sunni men who were detained by the commandos were later found tortured and killed. This death squad activity was going on under Petraeus' command, and was a critical factor in turning the Sunni Arab community wholesale against the Iraqi government. His role in the \$15 billion U.S. effort to train the 350,000 Iraqi security forces on the books is even more dismal.

Writing in the Washington Post in September 2004, Petraeus argued "18 months after entering Iraq, I see tangible progress. Iraqi security elements are being rebuilt from the ground up." He spoke glowingly of Iraqi leaders "stepping forward, leading their country and their security forces courageously," and listed the various outfits that were being trained "to shoulder more of the load for their own security."

Exactly one year later, as Petraeus was packing his bags to assume a new command stateside, of the nearly 100,000 Iraqi troops that had been "trained," only one battalion was capable of independent combat operations. In June of 2007, with the latest U.S. escalation complete, all talk of Iraqi security forces "taking over the fight" has disappeared. And so have Iraqi units, which are plagued with a desertion and absentee rate of more than 25 percent.

These days it seems the only Iraqis in the fight are either in death squads or attacking U.S. forces. Just a few months ago, The New York Times reported that Iraqi police have been caught cooperating with insurgents planting improvised explosive devices used against Americans while Iraqi soldiers have been killed in combat against U.S. troops in Baghdad.

COUNTERINSURGENCY

In late 2005 Petraeus assumed command at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, where he oversaw training programs for the entire U.S. Army. While there, he also co-wrote the U.S. military's first manual on counterinsurgency warfare in 20 years. His recommendations included setting up "Specialized paramilitary strike forces," "home guards to provide local security" and "paramilitary units."

This is precisely the strategy in setting up Sunni militias in Anbar province under the umbrella of the "Anbar Salvation Council." This is an old strategy, one with a grim historical record.

The New York Times observes that "providing weapons to breakaway rebel groups is not new in counterinsurgency warfare, and that in places where it has been tried before, including the French colonial war in Algeria, the British-led fight against insurgents in Malaya in the early 1950s, and in

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Vietnam, the effort often backfired, with weapons given to the rebels being turned against the forces providing them."

BLOWBACK AGAIN

In the Ramadi region, Petraeus endorsed a plan to arm and pay thousands of irregular forces that have all the makings of Sunni militias. Many of the Sunni groups the military is reaching out to "have had past links to Al Qaeda in Mesopotamia." Like their Shiite militia counterparts, there is the "possibility that some local leaders are using newly armed tribal members as their personal death squads to settle old scores."

This is entirely a Pentagon effort. Eight policemen told the Washington Post that "the U.S. military was giving them weapons, money and other materials such as uniforms, body armor, helmets and pickup trucks [and] paying salaries of up to \$900 a month to tribal fighters."

The New York Times notes that "some American officers" say arming Sunni groups, "could amount to the Americans' arming both sides in a future civil war." There is the risk "that any weapons given to Sunni groups will eventually be used against Shiites or against the Americans themselves."

In fact, this looks to be deliberate observes the Times: "the Americans seem to have concluded that as long as the Shiites maintain their militias, Shiite leaders are in a poor position to protest the arming of Sunni groups." One aide to the Iraqi Prime Minister blasted the American strategy, "We have enough militias in Iraq that we are struggling now to solve the problem. Why are we creating new ones?"

The Shiite parties should be concerned because U.S. commanders are encouraging the Sunni militias to go after the Mahdi Army, which is affiliated with the powerful Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr.

According to the Washington Post, this past July, a Sunni leader of one of the "neighborhood protection groups" in Baghdad told U.S. Army Col. Ricky D. Gibbs that his militia would, "clear the neighborhood of anyone who belongs to al-Qaeda or JAM [Jaish al-Mahdi or Mahdi Army] or even carries a bullet. We want you, sir, to give us the green light. They are ready."

While dispensing the usual warning of "You can't just shoot anybody," Gibbs told the Sunni leader, "You have the green light," and added, as for "the bad guys -- I don't care. Go get them."

This is the twisted landscape of the Iraq War. What began as a war to remake the Middle East has boomeranged. The Bush administration is fighting the Iraq War as an extension of the regional disaster it has spawned. Its goal is not even to stabilize Iraq, it is to create more chaos so as to counter Iran, Shiite movements and the broad array of Sunni-based resistance groups.

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None of this would be possible if the home front were not blissed out on shopping and celebrities. Bush may only have 16 more months to go, but the domestic disconnect - why oppose Bush's wars when he's headed out the door? - gives the administration freedom to fan the flames of war in the Middle East.

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- [Divide et Impera \(Stephen Gowans 22 Aug 2007\)](#)

Global Research, August 22, 2007 - Gowans.wordpress.com

The US is using a hoary imperial tactic dating back to the Romans to dominate Iraq and to justify a long-term military presence in the country

A US-financed program to build a Sunni paramilitary Guardian organization in Iraq, and US proposals for a soft partition of the country, are the latest steps in a divide and rule strategy the US is pursuing to keep Iraqis fighting among themselves so they won't fight the occupation. Sectarian strife also provides the US with the pretext it needs to establish a long-term military presence in the country.

The US occupation authority has made ethnicity and religion salient in Iraq, where once it was a matter of little moment in the daily political lives of Iraqis. The US organized elections and the army along sectarian lines. It decided which parties could run in elections, favoring those that emphasized religious affiliations (Sunni vs. Shia) and ethnicity (Arab vs. Kurd), while banning the largest non-sectarian party, the Baath party. Key government positions were doled out along sectarian lines. The interior ministry was turned over to the Badr Brigade, a sectarian Shia paramilitary organization. From head to toe, Iraq has been transformed from a secular society into one in which religious and ethnic identity matter. Imagine the Department of Homeland Security being turned over to the KKK, the Pentagon to Louis Farrakhan's Nation of Islam, while the Democrat and Republican parties are banned and replaced by religious and ethnic parties. If ever there was a recipe to get people fighting among themselves, this is it.

The most recent manifestation of the US divide and rule policy is a program to create a Sunni paramilitary Guardian force whose mandate is to protect Sunni neighborhoods (1). Imagine Washington creating a Black paramilitary Guardian force, a White paramilitary Guardian force, and a Hispanic paramilitary Guardian force in the US. The effect in sparking racial tension would be the same.

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Now, some US policy makers are talking about partitioning Iraq into Kurd, Sunni and Shia regions. Leading advocates include senior politicians and US ruling class foundations. Joseph Biden, chairman of the US Foreign Relations Committee and a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination endorses “soft” partition, as does Leslie Gelb, president emeritus of the influential Council on Foreign Relations (2). Last year, the two put together the Biden-Gelb plan, which calls for a “soft” partition of Iraq. Soft partition would see Iraq divided into three distinct ethno-religious regions: Kurdistan, Shiastan and Sunnistan, held together by a weak federal government.

Michael O’Hanlon, a senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, argues the “time may be approaching when the only hope for a more stable Iraq is soft partition (3).” The Brookings Institution, associated with the Rockefellers, is one of the most influential US ruling class policy-making organizations.

Western politicians portray Iraq as a country whose simmering sectarian tensions were held in check by the brutal repression of Saddam Hussein, a Sunni who ruled on behalf of the Sunni population and its political vehicle, the Baath party. It’s only now that Mr. Hussein’s tyrannical rule has ended that sectarian conflict has slipped its restraints and come to the surface. At least, that’s the favored US view. Trouble is, it’s a crock of shit. When “the Committee of Debaathification issued a list of 100,000 senior Iraqi Baathists who would not be allowed to enjoy government posts,” 66,000 of them turned out to be Shiites (4). And anyone who cared to check the deck of cards used to list the 55 top Iraqi officials the US invasion force wanted dead or alive, would discover that half were Shiite, and the remainder a mix of Sunnis, Christians and Kurds (5).

The former Ottoman territory that is now Iraq was governed as a single territory before 1880. The three provinces that were pieced together in 1921 to form modern Iraq had no “clear sectarian identities (6).” “For much of Iraq’s history, the two communities (Shia and Sunni) co-existed peacefully (7).”

Partitioning the country would be no mean feat. “The geographic boundaries do not run toward partition. There is no Sunnistan or Shiastan.” On the contrary, conditions are “highly commingled” with people “totally intermixed, especially in the major cities (8).” Five million Iraqis would have to be moved were the country to be divided into homogeneous ethno-religious slices (9).

More importantly, most Iraqis don’t want their country partitioned. “Apart from the Kurds in the north, there is no unanimous, popular demand for federalism or soft partition or any partition at all (10).”

The 1920 Revolution Brigades, one of three resistance groups to form the political office of the Iraqi resistance, rejects the idea of a sectarian division in Iraq. “Our position,” says its spokesman, “is that there are two kinds of people in Iraq: not Sunni and Shia, Kurdish and Arab, Muslim and Christian,

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but those who are with the occupation and those who are against it (11).” Sectarian divisions in Iraq have been amplified, he says, “as part of the ‘British imperial tactic of divide and rule (12).”

The British employed the Roman principle of *divide et impera* to enslave colonial peoples. The US has taken up the tradition. “Our endeavour,” remarked Lieutenant-Colonel Coke, Commandant of Moradabad during the middle of the nineteenth century, “should be to uphold in full force the (for us fortunate) separation which exists between the different religions and races, not to endeavour to amalgamate them. *Divide et impera* should be the principle of Indian government (13).” Lord Elphinstone, Governor of Bombay, seconded the motion. “*Divide et impera* was the old Roman motto, and it should be ours (14).”

Adumbrating US imperial tactics in Iraq, the British devised a system of separate electorates in India and separate representation by religion, caste and ethnicity. Sound familiar? “The effect of this electoral policy,” observed one commentator, was “to give the sharpest possible stimulus to communal antagonism (15).” Prior to British rule in India there was no trace of the type of Hindu-Muslim conflict that later emerged under British rule (16).

“There is no natural inevitable difficulty from the cohabiting of differing races or religions in one country (17).” Muslim and Hindu lived side-by-side peacefully until the British arrived in India; Sunni and Shiite commingled peacefully before the US imposed its occupation on the country. “The difficulties arise from social-political conditions. They arise, in particular, whenever a reactionary regime is endeavouring to maintain itself against the popular movement (18).”

In the USSR, diverse religions and races lived together amicably. Germans and Jews lived together peacefully under Germany’s Weimar Republic. It wasn’t until the Nazis emphasized national identity to weaken growing working class consciousness that systematic persecution of Jews began.

The strategy is simple. The last thing an occupying power wants is for the people it’s dominating to recognize their common situation and interests. Were they to do that, they might mobilize their energies to fight their common enemy. So occupied countries are organized by their occupiers along color, religious and ethnic fault-lines. Iraqis mustn’t think of themselves as Iraqis, but as Shiites, Sunnis and Kurds, locked in a struggle with each other for access to resources.

The same is true within imperialist countries. People who work for a living mustn’t identify with their class, but with their ethnic, religious or racial cohorts, or must be imbued with patriotism, so that they equate their personal interests with those of their ruling class. In this way, Americans and Britons who have nothing to gain personally from their country’s occupation of Iraq, and much to lose, are bamboozled into supporting the war. Likewise, employees who have much to gain from coming together as a class are diverted by racism, religion and patriotism.

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Another thing the US *divide et impera* tactic provides is an excuse to maintain a military presence in Iraq, and therefore, the continued domination of Iraq by Washington. For liberals, the argument that the US can't leave Iraq now, otherwise a full-scale civil war will erupt, is decisive. But what this view ignores is that the possibility of a full-scale civil war is the product of the occupation itself. Had the US not fomented ethnic and religious divisions, the possibility of a civil war would never have arisen. On the other hand, were the US to cease efforts to pit Iraqi against Iraqi, the occupation – already greatly challenged by the resistance, despite US divide and rule tactics – would surely be defeated, an outcome the US will never willingly consent to. Soft partition, then, seems to those seeking both sectarian peace and US withdrawal, to be the answer. But slicing the country up into Sunnistan, Shiastan and Kurdistan, won't set the stage for a US pull-out. On the contrary, "senior military planners caution that should partition become American policy, withdrawal almost certainly wouldn't. Partition would require a stabilization force – code for American military presence – of 75,000 to 100,000 troops for years to come (19)." Heads I win, tails you lose. No matter what, the US figures to be hanging around Iraq for a long time, using sectarian tensions as the justification for its ongoing presence. What will foil these plans are non-sectarian groups, like the 1920 Revolution Brigades, that recognize there are only two kinds of people in Iraq: those who are with the occupation and those who are against it.

Notes

1. New York Times, August 19, 2007.
2. The CFR brings together CEOs, government and military officials and scholars, to recommend policy to the US State Department. The policy recommendations are typically responses to problems identified in corporate boardrooms, or exclusive clubs catering to the ultra-wealthy. The State Department relies on very little internal expertise, and uses the ruling class funded, directed and staffed think tanks and foundations to suggest policy. The CFR is the most important and influential of these organizations in matters of US foreign relations. See G. William Dumhoff, *Who Rules America?* McGraw-Hill, 2005.
3. New York Times, August 19, 2007.
4. Workers World, February 11, 2007.
5. Ibid.
6. Reidar Visser, who studies Iraq's sectarian issues at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs, quoted in New York Times, August 19, 2007.
7. New York Times, March 26, 2006.
8. Joost Hilterman, deputy director of Middle East programs for the International Crisis Group, quoted in New York Times, August 19, 2007.
9. New York Times, August 19, 2007.
10. Hilterman.
11. Guardian (UK), July 19, 2007.

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12. Ibid.
13. R. Palme Dutt, *The Problem of India*, International Publishers, New York, 1943, p. 98.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., p. 101.
16. Ibid. p. 97.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
19. New York Times, August 19, 2007.

- [**Ordered Assassinations, Sectarian Bomb Attacks Targeting Iraqi Civilians \(Amsi 12 May 2007\)**](#)



Former collaborator discloses details of US-ordered assassinations, sectarian bomb attacks targeting Iraqi civilians

An Iraqi who asked not to be identified had disclosed some of the US activities such as assassinations and bombings in markets that aim at sparking sectarian fighting among Iraqis so as to facilitate the partition of the country.

He pointed out that he that he worked with the US occupation troops for about two and a half years and then was able to flee from them to an area outside Baghdad where, he hopes, the Americans will not be able to get to him.

The former Iraqi collaborator recalled: "I was a soldier in the Iraqi army in the war of 1991 and during the withdrawal from Kuwait I decided to seek asylum in Saudi Arabia along with dozens of others like me. That was how began the process whereby I was recruited into the American forces, for there were US military committees that chose a number of Iraqis who were willing to volunteer to join them and be transported to America. I was one of those," he said.

The former collaborator went on: "In 1992 I was taken to America, specifically to an island where most of the establishments were military. I was with a number of other Iraqis, one of them the former governor of an-Najaf, 'Adnan adh-Dharfi. We received military training and intense courses in English and in how to carry out tasks like assassination," he recounted.

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The former collaborator said that during the 2003 invasion and subsequent war, he was transported back to the interior of Iraq to carry out specific tasks assigned him by the US agencies.

"During the last war that led to the occupation of Iraq," he recalled, "I was with a group of my comrades who had received training in America in how to spread chaos in the ranks of the Iraqi army. We were brought into Iraq across the border from Saudi Arabia. We put on Iraqi army uniforms and our mission was basically to spread rumors among the Iraqis, such as that the American army had already got into such-and-such a city, or that it is on the outskirts of Baghdad and other such things, which were part of the reason for the rapid collapse of the Iraqi forces," he said.

The former collaborator went on: "the unit that I was with settled in the presidential palace in the al-A'zamiyah district. We were allowed to visit our relatives and relations in Baghdad once a month, and so I would go visit my family in 'Madinat as-Sadr' in eastern Baghdad. But after things began to get worse and the armed men began to shoot at everyone leaving the palace, I asked my family to come to the palace every now and then so I could see them. My job was being a guard, but after a time that situation changed and the American occupation forces put me in charge of a group of a unit that carried out assassinations in the streets of Baghdad," he said.

"Our task was to carry out assassinations of individuals. The US occupation army would supply us with their names, pictures, and maps of their daily movements to and from their place of residence and we were supposed to kill the Shi'i, for example, in the al-A'zamiyah, and kill the Sunni in the of 'Madinat as-Sadr', and so on."

"Anyone in the unit who made a mistake was killed. Three members of my team were killed by US occupation forces after they failed to assassinate Sunni political figures in Baghdad. A US force that had been so-ordered eliminated them. That took place two years ago," the former collaborator recalled.

The former collaborator said that the Americans have a unit for "dirty jobs." That unit is a mix of Iraqis, Americans, and foreigners and of the security detachments that are deployed in Baghdad and other Iraqi cities. This unit doesn't only carry out assassinations, but some of them specialize in planting bombs and car bombs in



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neighborhoods and markets. This unit carries out operations in which wanted people whom the American army does not want killed are arrested.

The former collaborator said that "operations of planting car bombs and blowing up explosives in markets are carried out in various ways, the best-known and most famous among the US troops is placing a bomb inside cars as they are being searched at checkpoints. Another way is to put bombs in the cars during interrogations. After the desired person is summoned to one of the US bases, a bomb is placed in his car and he is asked to drive to a police station or a marked for some purpose and there his car blows up."

The testimony of the former collaborator is consistent with some western reports that have disclosed the involvement of US military personnel in bombings that target Iraqi civilians. The British reporter Robert Fisk, AMSI noted, had recently met with Iraqis in Syria concerning such "black operations" carried out by the Americans.

The Egyptian writer and former editor of al-Ahram, Muhammad Hasanayn Haykal, also noted in an interview with al-Jazeera satellite TV that there are mercenaries who practically make up an army second only to the regular US army in Iraq in terms of their numbers and equipment. This force is now called the "Knights of Malta" Haykal said, and they are the cause of many of the attacks that target Iraqi civilians. Haykal noted that there are Iraqis and Lebanese working in the ranks of that force.

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- [**Spying in Baghdad: The CIA's Real Mission Impossible, 19 Jan 2007**](#)

By Jeff Stein, CQ National Security Editor

Many years ago, when I was a young Army Intelligence operative in South Vietnam, I had a daily routine to see if my spies had any new information for me.

I'd drive by a soccer stadium in Danang, the large coastal city where I lived, and I'd look for a particular mark on the wall. If it was there, I'd go to a prearranged place at a set time for a clandestine meeting with a go-between.

Many times the pick-up place was a pleasant beach about a mile from my house.

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The war was raging in the jungles and rice paddies less than 10 miles away, and communist agents were everywhere in the city. But security was good enough that they weren't likely to risk exposing themselves by kidnapping or killing me.

My secret courier was a young boy who would come along selling ice cream from a box slung over his shoulder. I'd buy a cone wrapped in rice paper, and drive away. Back at the office, I'd unroll the paper to decipher my spy's tiny handwriting.

Baghdad is nothing like that.

The chaotic, ubiquitous violence of Baghdad has kept the CIA indoors.

According to several well informed intelligence sources, hundreds of CIA operatives have become virtual prisoners in the Green Zone, the sprawling American enclave whose high walls and guards separate the U.S. embassy, military command and related civilian agencies from the raging sectarian violence in Baghdad's streets.

The CIA operatives cannot safely roam the city to meet their few agents, much less recruit new ones.

It's just too dangerous. CIA chiefs don't want to risk one getting kidnapped, tortured on camera and beheaded.

That would certainly dampen the allure of a career in the CIA.

So "they spend their days playing cards and watching DVDs," said a former senior CIA operations official who maintains close ties in the agency.

No Casualties

CIA spokesman Paul Gimigliano rejected such characterizations.

"Agency officers throughout Iraq take risks each day to gather intelligence that makes a critical difference to our country," he said in an e-mail.

"Many of our officers in Iraq operate outside the Green Zone every day," he added. "To say that violence has 'kept the CIA indoors' is simply wrong.

But one barometer of the CIA's caution critics point to is the lack of agency casualties in the war, which has killed more than 3,000 U.S. military personnel and wounded 25,000 more.

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Not a single CIA “case officer,” spy jargon for espionage operative, has been killed in Iraq, a half dozen former senior CIA officers with close knowledge of the situation there told me.

(A civilian construction manager gunned down near Baghdad by masked insurgents in 2004 might have been an undercover CIA agent, said a retired military intelligence officer, but that could not be immediately confirmed. The CIA, of course, never discusses personnel issues.)

A handful of CIA case officers have been wounded in Iraq, the sources said, including a female who survived being shot by a sniper.

But the absence of casualties speaks volumes, the sources said.

“Without being overly harsh, it really says that they are risk averse, more so than our troops,” says a senior Defense Department counterterrorism manager. “They are in armored vehicles, they convoy out of the bases that they live on.”

Reports of the CIA’s difficulty in getting out of the Green Zone to recruit and manage spies in Baghdad are so widespread that John D. Negroponte, the outgoing director of National Intelligence, was asked about it during a hearing of the House Intelligence Committee last Thursday, Jan. 18.

“What do you say to the criticism that I’ve heard from some agents that the value of the intelligence in Iraq is somewhat diluted by the fact that many of our agents are bottled up in the Green Zone . . .” Rep. John F. Tierney, D-Mass., asked John D. Negroponte.

Tierney said he’d heard that “their deployments are maybe too short . . . that there are too few Arabists, and that in some instances it’s claimed that we [can’t] even fully identify the number of different insurgent groups or [are not able] to identify which insurgent groups might be responsible for which insurgent acts.”

“Actually,” responded Negroponte, U.S. ambassador to Iraq for 10 months in 2004-2005, “our posture is sometimes better than we’re given credit for. Secondly, not everybody’s bottled up in the Green Zone.”

Negroponte, recently tapped to be Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s deputy, declined to elaborate in open session.

Stillborn

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But multiple CIA sources, who spoke freely only in exchange for anonymity, said the agency's mission of recruiting and managing human spies in Baghdad was stillborn in the weeks following the 2003 invasion and has never recovered, despite adding hundreds of personnel in the past few years.

That failure has virtually crippled U.S. strategic intelligence — inside information on the personalities and plans of the often hostile U.S.-backed government, not just the multiplying insurgent groups and armed militias — in Iraq.

"No one is recruiting the future leaders of Iraq," says the Pentagon counterterrorism official.

Tactical intelligence — the locations and types of enemy troops and weapons — is also suffering from a lack of access to the population and almost nonexistent language skills on the part of both CIA and military intelligence personnel, say these same sources, all of whom have decades of experience in clandestine operations.

That limits "other covert ops, like providing detonators which will either not work or will explode prematurely in the hands of the bomb makers," said the counterterrorism official.

"When you're fighting an insurgency," says an ex-senior CIA operative who helped rout al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, "you need hundreds and hundreds of informants."

Says CIA spokesman Gimiliano: "We know better than anyone the gaps in our knowledge about Iraq. But we also know that CIA's achievements there are rooted not in the Green Zone, but in the 'Red Zone' beyond.

"Some of that information is tactical, helping save the lives of American and Iraqi soldiers, and some is strategic, helping our government understand trends in the region."

Turmoil

The CIA has had three chiefs of station in Baghdad since U.S. troops pulled down the statue of Saddam Hussein on Apr. 9, 2003.

The first was a longtime operative and senior official who grew up in the Middle East in the 1950s, the son of a CIA legend in the agency's early "Good Shepherd" days.

Now retired himself, the official, whose name is being voluntarily withheld here, was CIA station chief in Cairo, among other Middle East assignments over the decades, before being dispatched to Iraq.

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“He was chosen to be the first to go into Baghdad and set things up not just because he knew the region so well, but because he’s such a nice guy, he can get along with the military really well, and he knows the Arabs and the area,” said a longtime colleague.

The CIA thought it would be a small office, since U.S. officials envisioned a short war and occupation.

“They really planned a station for only about 40 people,” said the colleague, who was also tasked with working on Iraq.

“They went in there in May and expected to be home by the end of June. They said, ‘Don’t worry about it, this whole thing, the military operation, is going to be over in May.’ ”

“And then the situation deteriorated,” the former official said. “By the fall they saw they needed a much bigger station.”

The CIA then dispatched a much younger officer, who spoke Arabic but whose administrative experience was limited to running the agency’s small station in Kuwait, said the source, in an account backed up by another top CIA veteran of post-9/11 counterterrorism campaigns.

In 2004 the station began swelling to its current staffing of about 500 operatives, technicians and other support personnel.

Scores of case officers were borrowed from Washington or elsewhere, particularly Europe and Africa, for short stints in Iraq, CIA sources said.

Many were out of shape and lacked basic military skills, said a source with first-hand knowledge of the situation.

They got two weeks’ combat orientation.

“They were overweight case officers from Geneva who we gave bandoleers and shotguns and then send them to Baghdad,” the source said.

In 2003 the Abu Ghraib prison abuse pictures surfaced, involving the CIA in the scandal.

“They felt he was in over his head,” the source said of the station chief. “They took him out and replaced him with a more senior officer.”

But before the second station chief left Baghdad that November, he filed a report that starkly contradicted the optimistic claims about Iraq by top administration officials.

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Inevitably, it leaked.

“It pulled no punches in detailing how the new insurgency was gaining strength from the political and economic vacuum that the United States had allowed to develop in Baghdad,” New York Times reporter James Risen wrote.

“For his honesty, the station chief was subjected to inflammatory accusations about his personal behavior, all of which he flatly denied,” and “quit the CIA in disgust.”

The Baghdad station’s third — and current — chief previously headed the CIA office in Kabul.

He also speaks Arabic, but presides over hundreds of operatives who cannot speak the local language or go anywhere.

Ray of Sunshine

The situation isn’t entirely bleak.

Many of the CIA’s young post-9/11 recruits are smart and tough and eager to get into the war, said a senior CIA veteran of Afghanistan.

“They’re good, real good,” he said.

But most of them, especially former Special Forces and Delta Force commandos, are employed in the CIA’s paramilitary branch and pretty much doing what they were doing before in Iraq: Conducting raids to disrupt terrorist attacks and snatch “high value targets,” from insurgent leaders to Iranian operatives.

Military spy services have tried to fill the intelligence vacuum, informed sources said, but they face the same dangerous streets and language deficits as the CIA.

“I heard about one personal meeting a case officer had with an agent,” said an amazed former CIA operator. “They rendezvoused in armored Humvees on a neighborhood street. That’s ridiculous.”

On the rare occasions that Americans walk the streets of Baghdad, they attract unwanted attention, intelligence sources say..

Meantime, Iraqis risk their lives being identified with U.S. troops or intelligence agents.

If they can’t risk being seen with an American, it’s nearly impossible for the CIA to contact and assess them for recruitment.

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Working through third parties — say, another Iraqi — risks losing control of the informant. It also opens up the operation to enemy penetration via double agents.

“Given the events of the past three years . . . the agency’s utility in such an environment is questionable,” says former Delta Force operative John Rollins, who up until last year was the Department of Homeland Security’s chief of staff for intelligence.

Most likely, he thinks, the CIA would reserve the “few Americans that can blend into the environment or speak the language” for “safer activities or missions where the payoff is significant,” such as trying to catch Osama bin Laden.

Talk about hard targets.

“Given the promises that were made and unfulfilled after Desert Storm [in 1991, when the first President Bush encouraged Iraqi Shiites to rebel against Saddam Hussein then stood aside as they were slaughtered] and questionable agency intelligence collection efforts leading up to this war,” Rollins said, “few locals may wish to be associated with the agency.”

Jeff Stein can be reached at jstein@cq.com.

Note: This update includes a statement from CIA spokesman Paul Gimigliano rejecting critical comments about the agency’s Baghdad station.

First posted Jan. 19, 2007 8:08 p.m.

- [**John Pilger detects the Salvador Option \(03 May 2006\)**](#)

The American public is being prepared. If the attack on Iran does come, there will be no warning, no declaration of war, no truth, writes John Pilger

The lifts in the New York Hilton played CNN on a small screen you could not avoid watching. Iraq was top of the news; pronouncements about a "civil war" and "sectarian violence" were repeated incessantly. It was as if the US invasion had never happened and the killing of tens of thousands of civilians by the Americans was a surreal fiction. The Iraqis were mindless Arabs, haunted by religion, ethnic strife and the need to blow themselves up. Unctuous puppet politicians were paraded with no hint that their exercise yard was inside an American fortress.

And when you left the lift, this followed you to your room, to the hotel gym, the airport, the next

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airport and the next country. Such is the power of America's corporate propaganda, which, as Edward Said pointed out in *Culture and Imperialism*, "penetrates electronically" with its equivalent of a party line.

The party line changed the other day. For almost three years it was that al-Qaeda was the driving force behind the "insurgency", led by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a bloodthirsty Jordanian who was clearly being groomed for the kind of infamy Saddam Hussein enjoys. It mattered not that al-Zarqawi had never been seen alive and that only a fraction of the "insurgents" followed al-Qaeda. For the Americans, Zarqawi's role was to distract attention from the thing that almost all Iraqis oppose: the brutal Anglo-American occupation of their country.

Now that al-Zarqawi has been replaced by "sectarian violence" and "civil war", the big news is the attacks by Sunnis on Shia mosques and bazaars. The real news, which is not reported in the CNN "mainstream", is that the Salvador Option has been invoked in Iraq. This is the campaign of terror by death squads armed and trained by the US, which attack Sunnis and Shias alike. The goal is the incitement of a real civil war and the break-up of Iraq, the original war aim of Bush's administration. The ministry of the interior in Baghdad, which is run by the CIA, directs the principal death squads. Their members are not exclusively Shia, as the myth goes. The most brutal are the Sunni-led Special Police Commandos, headed by former senior officers in Saddam's Ba'ath Party. This unit was formed and trained by CIA "counter-insurgency" experts, including veterans of the CIA's terror operations in central America in the 1980s, notably El Salvador. In his new book, *Empire's Workshop* (Metropolitan Books), the American historian Greg Grandin describes the Salvador Option thus: "Once in office, [President] Reagan came down hard on central America, in effect letting his administration's most committed militarists set and execute policy. In El Salvador, they provided more than a million dollars a day to fund a lethal counter-insurgency campaign . . . All told, US allies in central America during Reagan's two terms killed over 300,000 people, tortured hundreds of thousands and drove millions into exile."

Although the Reagan administration spawned the current Bushites, or "neo-cons", the pattern was set earlier. In Vietnam, death squads trained, armed and directed by the CIA murdered up to 50,000 people in Operation Phoenix. In the mid-1960s in Indonesia CIA officers compiled "death lists" for General Suharto's killing spree during his seizure of power. After the 2003 invasion, it was only a matter of time before this venerable "policy" was applied in Iraq.

According to the investigative writer Max Fuller (National Review Online), the key CIA manager of the interior ministry death squads "cut his teeth in Vietnam before moving on to direct the US military mission in El Salvador". Professor Grandin names another central America veteran whose job now is to "train a ruthless counter-insurgent force made up of ex-Ba'athist thugs". Another, says Fuller, is

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well-known for his "production of death lists". A secret militia run by the Americans is the Facilities Protection Service, which has been responsible for bombings. "The British and US Special Forces," concludes Fuller, "in conjunction with the [US-created] intelligence services at the Iraqi defence ministry, are fabricating insurgent bombings of Shias."

On 16 March, Reuters reported the arrest of an American "security contractor" who was found with weapons and explosives in his car. Last year, two Britons disguised as Arabs were caught with a car full of weapons and explosives; British forces bulldozed the Basra prison to rescue them. The Boston Globe recently reported: "The FBI's counter-terrorism unit has launched a broad investigation of US-based theft rings after discovering that some of the vehicles used in deadly car bombings in Iraq, including attacks that killed US troops and Iraqi civilians, were probably stolen

in the United States, according to senior government officials."

As I say, all this has been tried before - just as the preparation of the American public for an atrocious attack on Iran is similar to the WMD fabrications in Iraq. If that attack comes, there will be no warning, no declaration of war, no truth. Imprisoned in the Hilton lift, staring at CNN, my fellow passengers could be excused for not making sense of the Middle East, or Latin America, or anywhere. They are isolated. Nothing is explained. Congress is silent. The Democrats are moribund. And the freest media on earth insult the public every day. As Voltaire put it: "Those who can make you believe absurdities can make you commit atrocities."

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- [About the assassination of Iraqi academics 22 April 2006 - Talk given at the International Seminar in Madrid 22-23 April 2006](#)

Dirk Adriaensens, *BRussells* Tribunal

First let me congratulate the Spanish people for the fierce opposition against the war and occupation of Iraq. And the Spanish government that has listened to its people and has decided to withdraw from Iraq because it became clear that this war was based on lies and was illegal under international law.

The *BRussells* Tribunal was originally a hearing committee composed of academics, intellectuals and artists in the tradition of the Russell Tribunal, set up in 1967 to investigate war crimes committed during the Vietnam War. The *BRussells* Tribunal was directed against the war in Iraq and the imperial war policies of the Bush II administration. Its main focus was the 'Project for the New American Century', the think tank behind this war, in particular three of the co-signatories of the mission statement: Donald Rumsfeld, Dick Cheney and Paul Wolfowitz.

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At a networking conference set up by the [Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation](#) at the end of June 2003 in Brussels, it was decided that a series of hearings would be held in different places all over the world, culminating in a final session in Istanbul. The BRussells Tribunal was one of these commissions of inquiry, the opening session of the [World Tribunal on Iraq](#). The Bertrand Russell Peace Foundation accepted to support the initiative. The World Tribunal on Iraq evolved as a worldwide initiative and had Tribunal sessions and associated events in some 25 cities and countries worldwide. Many of the people present here were involved in the WTI and we are still cooperating, as this seminar shows. We work together on the basis of the platform text and the conclusions of the WTI.

After our Tribunal session, we were facing the question what to do next, how to proceed according to our conclusions. We decided to ACT. The ongoing atrocities in Iraq need our monitoring and the Iraqis need our support. A lot of our international friends, who organised similar events, share this viewpoint. That's why we established a cooperation and bundled our efforts. And let it be very clear: not only do we monitor the occupation, we act against the war, against the illegal occupation of the sovereign state of Iraq, and we support all attempts of the Iraqi people to regain its sovereignty. We are a citizen's initiative, meaning that we work independent from political parties.

This independent, consistent and effective way of working has attracted some fine and influential people like Harold Pinter, José Saramago, Eduardo Galeano, Samir Amin, Denis Halliday and Hans von Sponeck, Margarita Papandreou, Naomi Klein etc. It's an explosive mixture of academics, activists, lawyers, artists, journalists and intellectuals. They seem to believe in the format and the potential of this network. In a way it's reassuring, also for them, to belong to an active group and be able to discuss recent developments and actions. This is necessary in order to better understand the situation in Iraq. All these people are connected with each other and can ask or give advice, bring ideas to the forum, spread important news, and so we attempt to help the peace movement solve some difficult questions as f.i. should we support the resistance, should the MNF-I leave Iraq etc. We also act as a sort of hub to connect people. The way this committee works is a rather new concept, I don't know about any similar initiative. And it's very workable.

The backbone of our committee is composed of patriotic Iraqis, both from inside Iraq and from the Diaspora. They belong to different currents. We have the chairs from different Human Rights organisations, medical associations, academic associations inside Iraq. This choice wasn't made accidentally. They are better aware of the pitfalls. They know better than all of us the realities on the ground. They know better what has to be done in the current situation and can help on a different number of issues. They understand what's going on in Iraq. It's their country. If we want to spread correct information and viewpoints to the Western audiences, we need the Iraqis to advise us. The BRussells Tribunal is about THEIR country. So we want to be a bridge between the Iraqi and the Western peace movement. We publish regularly eyewitness accounts and Iraqi Human Rights reports

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that we receive. That has helped us a lot because the situation of Iraq is extremely complicated for outsiders like us. We cannot make a decent analysis without their help or support.

Now, I tell all this to give you some background and a context of who we are and why we think we can speak with some authority about Iraqi issues.

About the Academics campaign

The pattern of academics assassinated appears to substantiate claims that a campaign exists and is being conducted to erase a key section of the secular middle class in Iraq — a class that has largely resisted the US occupation of Iraq and refused to be co-opted by the so-called “political process” or Iraq’s US-installed puppet government. Academics are not the only ones being killed: 311 teachers killed the past 4 months, 182 pilots, 416 senior military officers killed in the first 3 months of 2006. 20.000 people kidnapped since the beginning of 2006.

It were the Iraqi intellectuals who asked us to start a campaign to create awareness for this problem.

When we started, it was clear we had to avoid some traps and pitfalls. I’ll sum up a few of the most important.

1. we had to avoid complicity in any way with the occupying forces and its puppet government. We don’t want to humanize this dreadful occupation. That’s why we appeal to international human rights organisations and the UNHCHR to investigate this matter, and not to the Iraqi puppet government and the occupying forces, who are the perpetrators of these crimes.
2. We had to make sure to work with many different Iraqi anti-occupation organisations and individuals, in order to be as inclusive as possible.
3. We had to avoid putting this issue in the context of a sectarian strife between Sunni’s and Shia. I will develop this point later.
4. We had to avoid to look at this issue as being a sort of revenge against academics of the previous government. The so-called Debaathification was the first step in the destruction of Iraq’s educational system. It was used by the US to divide and destroy Iraq. Most of these so-called “revenge killings” that took place after the war can be attributed to the occupying forces and collaborators.
5. We had to counter the claims of the Iraqi puppet government, the US occupiers, and the recently started campaign to safeguard the Iraqi academics, backed by both the government of Iraq and UNESCO, that criminal gangs are committing these assassinations.
6. Also, we had to mention the possible role of the Mossad in these assassinations, even though we have no hard evidence to substantiate the many assertions that Israel in involved.

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7. We have to carry out this campaign in the most effective and prudent way, in order not to put the Iraqi academics even in a more dangerous situation. This requires close contacts on the ground and a lot of consultation. We distributed questionnaires from UNHCHR to the families of the victims. Not one has returned until now. The reason that is being given is that the families are too afraid to openly accuse the perpetrators. They are even too afraid to ask the police for details about the crime.

We drafted our petition very carefully, in cooperation with the Iraqis of the *BRussells* Tribunal network. The result is that besides over 8.000 academics worldwide, all the different patriotic currents and Iraqi anti-occupation movements have signed our petition. It was the first time something like this happened. So ours is a unifying rather than a divisive action.

Death Squads and the Salvador option

I would like to look into one major point of concern connected to this issue, and that is the so-called sectarian issue: some commentators claim that the assassination campaign of academics is part of a so-called civil war between Sunni and Shia. That's it's the ignorant Islamist Shia who receives direct orders from Iran to kill intellectual Sunni's, and that it is unfortunately beyond the control of the US now. And thus the occupying forces should remain in Iraq to restore law and order. Mainstream media are raising this smokescreen to hide the truth from getting out.

Another smokescreen is the claim that most of the assassinations are carried out by criminal gangs, who first kidnap their victims, and then a ransom is paid. And after that either they are assassinated, and if not, they flee the country.

I want to put this campaign in the context where it ought to be.

What we are witnessing is the result of a carefully planned US campaign to liquidate every Iraqi who opposes the occupation of his country, the so-called "Salvador option". In fact, since 1945 the U.S. developed counterinsurgency policies based on the model of Nazi suppression of partisan insurgents that emphasized placing the civilian population under strict control and using terror to make the population afraid to support or collaborate with insurgents.

On January 1 2004, Robert Dreyfuss stated that: "part of a secret \$3 billion in new funds—tucked away in the \$87 billion Iraq appropriation that Congress approved in early November 2003 — will go toward the creation of a paramilitary unit manned by militiamen associated with former Iraqi exile groups. Experts say it could lead to a wave of extrajudicial killings, not only of armed rebels but of nationalists, other opponents of the U.S. occupation and thousands of civilian Baathists—up to 120,000 of the estimated 2.5 million former Baath Party members in Iraq. "They're clearly cooking up joint teams to do Phoenix-like things, like they did in Vietnam," said Vincent Cannistraro, former CIA chief of

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counter terrorism. The bulk of the covert money will support U.S. efforts to create a lethal, and revenge-minded, Iraqi security force. “The big money would be for standing up an Iraqi secret police to liquidate the resistance,” said John Pike, an expert on classified military budgets at www.globalsecurity.org. “And it has to be politically loyal to the United States.” It’s also pouring money into the creation of an Iraqi secret police staffed mainly by gunmen associated with members of the puppet Iraqi Governing Council. Those militiamen are linked to Ahmad Chalabi’s Iraqi National Congress (inc), the Kurdish peshmerga (“facing death”) forces and Shiite paramilitary units, especially those of the Iran-backed Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. Technically illegal, these armed forces have been tolerated, even encouraged, by the Pentagon.” End of quote.

This was written on the 1st of January 2004. Soon after this blood-money was drained to Iraq, the consequences of this secret operation became clear. According to an article published in New York Times Magazine, in September 2004, Counsellor to the US Ambassador for Iraqi Security Forces James Steele was assigned to work with a new elite Iraqi counter-insurgency unit known as the Special Police Commandos, formed under the operational control of Iraq’s Interior Ministry.

Many of the same men in charge of training El Salvador's right-wing counter-insurgency forces during its bloody civil war are revealed to be advisors to Iraqi security forces.

Max Fuller, a specialist in Latin-America, has investigated this matter thoroughly. He writes: “From 1984 to 1986 then Col. Steele had led the US Military Advisory Group in El Salvador, where he was responsible for developing special operating forces at brigade level during the height of the conflict. These forces, composed of the most brutal soldiers available, replicated the kind of small-unit operations with which Steele was familiar from his service in Vietnam. Rather than focusing on seizing terrain, their role was to attack ‘insurgent’ leadership, their supporters, sources of supply and base camps. In military circles it was the use of such tactics that made the difference in ultimately defeating the guerrillas; for others, such as the Catholic priest Daniel Santiago, the presence of people like Steele contributed to another sort of difference:

“People are not just killed by death squads in El Salvador – they are decapitated and then their heads are placed on pikes and used to dot the landscape. Men are not just disemboweled by the Salvadoran Treasury Police; their severed genitalia are stuffed into their mouths. Salvadoran women are not just raped by the National Guard; their wombs are cut from their bodies and used to cover their faces. It is not enough to kill children; they are dragged over barbed wire until the flesh falls from their bones, while parents are forced to watch. (Cited by Chomsky)”. The responsible person for these atrocities was John Negroponte, then Ambassador to Honduras from 1981-1985, appointed as US Ambassador in Baghdad.

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Iraq's interior minister Bayan Jabr, has admitted death squads and other unauthorised armed groups have been carrying out sectarian killings in the country. In a BBC interview on April 11 2006, he denied these groups were his responsibility. He added that there are non-governmental armed groups called the Facility Protection Service, set up in 2003 by the U.S. occupation, that number 150,000 effectives. These 150,000 hired guns are "out of order, not under our control," along with another 30,000 private security guards, Jabr said.

But the prime minister, Ibrahim Jaafari, described the Badr organisation last summer as a "shield" defending Iraq, while the president, Jalal Talabani, claimed the Badr organisation and the peshmerga were patriots who "are important to fulfilling this sacred task, establishing a democratic, federal and independent Iraq".

John Pace, the outgoing head of the UN human rights office in Iraq, told the March 2 British Guardian that many killings were carried out by Shia militias linked to the interior ministry run by Bayan Jabr, a leading figure in the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)". SCIRI is the main party in the coalition of Shiite religious parties that heads the US-backed Iraqi government. "The Badr brigade [SCIRI's militia] are in the police and are mainly the ones doing the killing", said Pace. "They're the most notorious."

However, I tend to believe Bayan Jabr. I think he knows very well what's going on, but I believe him when he says these groups are not his responsibility, because I think that these militia's, who were created, financed, armed and trained by the occupying forces, are under the direct control of the US.

Steven Casteel works as a senior vice-president of Vance, a security company. "*Just prior to joining Vance, Mr. Casteel was selected by the White House to be Senior Advisor to Iraq's Ministry of Interior under the Coalition Provisional Authority and later the Department of State. In that capacity he advised former Ambassadors Bremer and Negroponte on non-military security matters, set policy, and led the creation and operations of the Ministry's critical services. Services included the new Iraqi Police, Border Police, Immigration, Customs Service, Civil Defense and Fire Programs. Responsibilities included recruitment, training, equipping, and deployment of services and personnel*" (<http://www.vanceglobal.com/whoweare/leadership/casteel/>). So he was involved in overseeing the training and creating of Iraqi police forces.

As a former top DEA man, he was involved in the hunt for Colombia's notorious cocaine baron Pablo Escobar, during which the DEA collaborated with a paramilitary organization known as *Los Pepes*, which later transformed itself into the AUC, an umbrella organization covering all of Colombia's paramilitary death squads.

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Like Colombia's death squads, Iraq's Police Commandos deliberately cultivate a frightening paramilitary image. During raids they openly intimidate and brutalize suspects, even in the presence of foreign journalists. Significantly, many of the Commandos, including their leader, are Sunni Muslims.

Many of the highest-ranking officers in the Wolf brigade f.i. are Sunnis and, when asked about other minorities, Abul Waleed, a 41-year-old three-star general from the old regime, mentions Kurds and even a Yazidi, as members of these brigades. General Adnan Thabit, a Sunni and general under Saddam Hussein, is the leader of Iraq's Special Police Commandos.

Of course some of the sections of these militia's may follow an Iranian agenda, or a sectarian agenda, but if you look at the composition and actions of these death squads, they should certainly not be called "Shiite death squads", but "anti-resistance death squads".

Putting the primary blame for these killing on criminal gangs or on Iran, is serving the US interests in the region. Continuously linking "Shiite" to "death squads" also serves the US agenda by fuelling sectarian strife and so contributing to the deliberate disintegration of the country.

Many of the murdered academics are Shia, and what most of those killed academics have in common, is their opposition to the US occupation of Iraq.

Patrick Lang, former chief of Middle East analysis for the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency says: "What those of us in El Salvador learned was that American policy might call for surgical action, but once the local troops are involved, they're as likely to use a chain-saw as a scalpel. And that, too, can serve American ends. In almost any counter-insurgency, the basic message the government or the occupiers tries to get across to the population is brutally simple: "We can protect you from the guerrillas, but the guerrillas can't protect you from us, and you've got to choose sides." Sometimes you can win the population's hearts and minds; sometimes you just have to make them more frightened of you than they are of the insurgents." And for this aim they use the Wolf Brigade, the Scorpions Brigade, the Lions Brigade, the Peshmerga's and the "security forces" of the Ministry of Interior.

We receive many eye-witness reports from inside Iraq. They are published on the *BRussells Tribunal* website.

One report describes a case where people are arrested by the Badr Brigade, with the help of US forces and brought to secret prisons under the control of the Badr brigades.

Another report describes how in the aftermath of the bombing of the Askariyah shrine in Samarra, the village of Al Fursan, south of Baghdad, is ethnically cleaned by black-clad militias and police commandos while American tanks are standing by, watch what happens and don't interfere while people are being slaughtered, houses being burned.

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The latest report dates from 17 of April. Men in police uniforms attacked the Al-Adhamiya neighbourhood in Baghdad. The Ministry of Interior claimed the uniformed men didn't belong to the puppet forces, but local residents are quite sure they were special forces from the Ministry of Interior, probably Badr brigades. The neighbourhood was sealed off and electricity was cut off. When the uniformed forces entered the neighbourhood, the National Guards that are usually patrolling the streets left. Young armed men from the neighbourhood fought side by side with mujahedin against the attacking forces to protect Al-Adhamiya. Several residents have been killed in the streets. US troops also entered the neighbourhood. At first, they only stood by and watched; later on they, too, fired at the locals, who tried to repel the attacks. These reports show that there is at least complicity of the US forces in the actions of the militia's.

These examples show that there is at least complicity of the US forces in the actions of the militia's.

To conclude I would like to denounce the total lack of interest in human lives by the occupying forces and the Western mainstream press. There is obviously a lot of racism involved in the way this occupation is handled by the MNF-I and covered by the media. Some of the academics assassinated were among the finest scientists not only in the Middle East, but worldwide. Nevertheless, none of these murders have been investigated, and very few commemorations appeared in the Western press when these famous academics were killed. And that is another crime.

Dirk Adriaensens.

Member *BRussells* Tribunal Executive Committee

- **Thanks to Robert Dreyfuss ("Phoenix Rising", <http://brusselstribunal.org/ArticlesOnIraq.htm#Phoenix>) and Max Fuller (a.o. "For Iraq, "The Salvador Option" Becomes Reality", <http://globalresearch.ca/articles/FUL506A.html>) whose articles are extensively quoted**
- **A comprehensive dossier about death squads can be found as a PDF file: <http://brusselstribunal.org/pdf/DeathSquads.pdf>.**

* Additional sources (taken from: Death Squads in Iraq: A timeline)

www.dailykos.com/storyonly/2006/3/23/202410/772

January 14, 2005: Newsweek breaks the "Salvador Option" story. (Newsweek)

January 25, 2005: Human Rights Watch releases a damning report alleging torture and mistreatment of detainees by the new Iraqi government. (Human Rights Watch)

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April 28, 2005: The new Iraqi government is approved. The Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution wins control of the Interior Ministry. The new minister is Bayan Jabr. (Juan Cole)(PBS)

May 1, 2005: Many of the same men in charge of training El Salvador's right-wing counter-insurgency forces during its bloody civil war are revealed to be advisors to Iraqi security forces. (NYT Magazine)

May 16, 2005 55 dead bodies are discovered in Iraq. (CNN)

May 22, 2005: An elite group of commandos known as the Wolf Brigade is profiled by Knight Ridder. The group is notorious for its brutal treatment of detainees. (Knight Ridder)

June 12, 2005: 20 bodies are found around Baghdad. Many of them show signs of torture. (CNN)

June 28, 2005: Numerous Sunni males turn up dead after being detained by men wearing police uniforms. (Knight Ridder)

July 7, 2005: Horrifying descriptions of torture by Iraqi security forces emerge. (The Observer)

September 8, 2005: The U.N. expresses concern over abuses by pro-government forces in Iraq. (Reuters)

September 16, 2005: CBS reports on the torture and execution of numerous Sunnis. (CBS News)

October 7, 2005: At least 537 bodies have been found since April, many of them Sunnis. (Associated Press)

October 12, 2005: Sectarian hatred extends itself into the Iraqi military. (Knight Ridder)

November 15, 2005: U.S. Forces discover a secret torture center run by Iraq's Interior Ministry. (Washington Post)

November 27, 2005: Former Iraqi Prime Minister Ayad Allawi claims that the human rights situation in Iraq is just as bad, if not worse, than it was under Saddam. (CNN)

November 28, 2005: Abuse of prisoners in Iraq is called routine. (Knight Ridder)

Interior Minister Bayan Jabr defends the alleged torture camp. (CNN)

November 29, 2005: The NY Times and LA Times both run stories about allegations of Shiites running death squads that target Sunnis. (Los Angeles Times)(New York Times)

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December 11, 2005: Torture is discovered at a second Interior Ministry run prison in Iraq. (Washington Post)

December 27, 2006: US refuses to handover jails and prisons to Iraqis until conditions improve (Times Online)

January 22, 2006: Iraqis attempt to find officials without ties to militias. USA Today

January 25, 2006: Sunni leaders urge followers to defend against deadly house raids. (Knight Ridder)

February 5, 2006: 14 blindfolded tortured bodies found in Baghdad, called common occurrence. (Washington Post)

February 16, 2006: Iraq's government launches investigation into death squad claims after US general catches Iraqi policemen about to execute a Sunni. (BBC News)

February 22, 2006 Powerful blast destroys Golden Mosque in Samarra. Shiites swear revenge. (New York Times)

February 23, 2006: 47 predominantly Sunni workers are stopped at a checkpoint and massacred outside Baghdad. (Knight Ridder)

February 26, 2006: Andrew Buncombe and Patrick Cockburn report that hundreds of Iraqis are being tortured to death every month by Interior Ministry death squads. (The Independent)

February 28, 2006: Violence since mosque explosion kills more than 1,300 Iraqis. (Washington Post)

March 2, 2006: Director of the Baghdad morgue claims that up to 7,000 people have been killed by death squads in the past several months. (The Guardian)

March 8, 2006: the State Department criticizes the Iraqi government's human rights violations in its annual report. (State Department)

Gunmen dressed up as Interior Ministry commandos raid a private security company and abduct 50 people. A US Military patrol comes across a bus with the bodies of 18 men piled up inside. (Washington Post)

March 12, 2006: Iraqi officials admit to the existence of death squads operating from inside the government. (Knight Ridder)

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March 14, 2006: Iraqi authorities find 80 dead bodies over the course of two days. (BBC News)

March 20, 2006: The US continues to arm and train the same Iraqi security forces accused of having a sectarian bent and committing numerous massacres. (Time)

March 22, 2006: The U.N. demands that the Iraqi government reign in their abusive security forces. (UN News Centre)



Col. James Steele and General Abul Waleed (Responsible person of the Wolf Brigade) in Samarra

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- [Robert Fisk: Somebody is trying to provoke a civil war in Iraq. \(03 March 2006\)](#)

The real question I ask myself is: who are these people who are trying to provoke the civil war? Now the Americans will say it's Al Qaeda, it's the Sunni insurgents. It is the death squads. Many of the death squads work for the Ministry of Interior. Who runs the Ministry of Interior in Baghdad? Who pays the Ministry of the Interior? Who pays the militia men who make up the death squads? We do, the occupation authorities.

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Robert Fisk shares his Middle East knowledge

Reporter: Tony Jones

TONY JONES: Well, Robert Fisk is one of the most experienced observers of the Middle East and in his latest book, 'The Great War for Civilisation - the Conquest of the Middle East', he draws on almost 30 years of reporting from his base in Lebanon to look at the forces which have shaped current events and conflicts Robert Fisk, thanks for being there.

ROBERT FISK, WRITER & JOURNALIST: You're welcome.

TONY JONES: Now, unless you've changed your position in recent days, the one thing that you and President Bush agree on is there's not going to be a civil war in Iraq.

ROBERT FISK: Yeah, I listened to Bush. It made me doubt myself when I heard him say that. I still go along and say what I said before - Iraq is not a sectarian society, but a tribal society. People are intermarried. Shiites and Sunnis marry each other. It's not a question of having a huge block of people here called Shiites and a huge block of people called Sunnis any more than you can do the same with the United States, saying Blacks are here and Protestants are here and so on. But certainly, somebody at the moment is trying to provoke a civil war in Iraq. Someone wants a civil war. Some form of militias and death squads want a civil war. There never has been a civil war in Iraq. The real question I ask myself is: who are these people who are trying to provoke the civil war? Now the Americans will say it's Al Qaeda, it's the Sunni insurgents. It is the death squads. Many of the death squads work for the Ministry of Interior. Who runs the Ministry of Interior in Baghdad? Who pays the Ministry of the

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Interior? Who pays the militia men who make up the death squads? We do, the occupation authorities. I'd like to know what the Americans are doing to get at the people who are trying to provoke the civil war. It seems to me not very much. We don't hear of any suicide bombers being stopped before they blow themselves up. We don't hear of anybody stopping a mosque getting blown up. We're not hearing of death squads all being arrested. Something is going very, very wrong in Baghdad. Something is going wrong with the Administration. Mr Bush says, "Oh, yes, sure, I talk to the Shiites and I talk to the Sunnis." He's talking to a small bunch of people living behind American machine guns inside the so-called Green Zone, the former Republican palace of Saddam Hussein, which is surrounded by massive concrete walls like a crusader castle. These people do not and cannot even leave this crusader castle. If they want to leave to the airport, they're helicoptered to the airport. They can't even travel on the airport road. What we've got at the moment is a little nexus of people all of whom live under American protection and talk on the telephone to George W Bush who says, "I've been talking to them and they have to choose between chaos and unity." These people can't even control the roads 50 metres from the Green Zone in which they work.

TONY JONES: OK.

ROBERT FISK: There's total chaos now in Iraq.

TONY JONES: Let's go back, if we can, to start answering that question about who wants civil war. Back one week to the bombing of the golden shrine in Samarra. Now, most people do think the only people with reasons for doing that would be the Al Qaeda in Iraq group led by al-Zarqawi. You don't agree?

ROBERT FISK: Well, I don't know if al-Zarqawi is alive. You know, al-Zarqawi did exist before the American Anglo-American invasion. He was up in the Kurdish area, which was not actually properly controlled by Saddam. But after that he seems to have disappeared. We know there's an identity card that pops up. We know the Americans say we think we've recognised him on a videotape. Who recognises him on a videotape? How many Americans have ever met al-Zarqawi? Al-Zarqawi's mother died more than 12 months ago and he didn't even send commiserations or say "I'm sorry to hear that". His wife of whom he was very possessive is so poor she has to go out and work in the family town of Zarqa. Hence the name Zarqawi. I don't know if al-Zarqawi is alive or exists at the moment. I don't know if he isn't a sort of creature invented in order to fill in the narrative gaps, so to speak. What is going on in Iraq at the moment is extremely mysterious. I go to Iraq and I can't crack this story at the moment. Some of my colleagues are still trying to, but can't do it. It's not as simple as it looks. I don't believe we've got all these raving lunatics wandering around blowing up mosques. There's much more to this than meets the eye. All of these death squads that move around are part of the security forces. In some cases they are Shiite security forces or clearly Sunni security forces. When the Iraqi army go

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into Sunni cities they are Shiite soldiers going in. We are not making this clear. Iraqi troops, we've got an extra battalion. The Iraqi army is building up. The Iraqi army is split apart. Somebody is operating these people. I don't know who they are. It's not as simple as we're making it out to be. What is this thing when Bush says we have to choose between chaos and unity? Who wants to choose chaos? Is it really the case that all of these Iraqis that fought together for eight years against the Iranians, Shiites and Sunnies together in the long massive murderous Somme-like war between the Iranians and Iraqis - suddenly all want to kill each other? Why because that's something wrong with Iraqis? I don't think so. They are intelligent, educated people. Something is going seriously wrong in Baghdad.

TONY JONES: Can we look at one thing that might possibly be wrong, the Sunnis feel like they are being left out of the political equation. The Shias could end up running the majority of the government because they are indeed in the majority in a democracy.

ROBERT FISK: They do run the Government now. The Shiites do run the Government.

TONY JONES: Indeed. Couldn't that precisely be one of the reasons for the violence?

ROBERT FISK: Because the Sunnis don't have power anymore? But we've been saying this if the start. Don't you remember that after 2003 the Anglo-American invasion, the resistance started against the Americans and we were told they were Saddam remnants, 'dead-enders', that was the phrase used. Not anymore, because there are 40,000 insurgents, but that was the phrase used at the time. They were Sunnis. They didn't like the fact they didn't have power. Then we captured Saddam and Paul Bremer, the number two pro-Consulate in Baghdad, says, "Oh, we've got him," and everything was going to be OK. And then the insurgency got worse still. The reason was because people who wanted to join the insurgency feared that if they beat him out he might come back. Well, the moment Saddam was captured, they knew they could join the insurgency and Saddam wouldn't come back. I mean, there is something wrong in the narrative sequence that we've been given. You know, the idea that the Sunni community is suddenly sacrificing themselves en mass, strapping explosive belts to themselves and blowing themselves up all over Iraq because they don't have power anymore is a very odd reflection. I think what is going on among the Sunni community is much simpler. The Sunnis are not fighting the Americans because they don't have power and they're not fighting the Americans just to get them out - and they will get them out eventually. They are fighting the Americans so that they will say, "We have a right to power because we fought the occupying forces and you, the Shiites, did not," which is why it's very important to discover now that Moqtada al-Sadr, who has an ever-increasing power base among the Shiite community, is himself threatening to fight the British and Americans. Now, if the Shiites and Sunnies come together, as they did in the 1920s in the insurgency against the British, then we are finished in Iraq. And that will mean that Iraq actually will be united.

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TONY JONES: But, Robert Fisk, what's is happening now, by all accounts and, indeed, the accounts of these *Washington Post* reporters who've been into the morgue and report hundreds of bodies of Sunnies who evidently have been garroted or suffocated or shot, are all saying that Moqtada al-Sadr's thugs have actually taken these people away and murdered them. That was in revenge for the Golden Shrine bombing.

ROBERT FISK: Yeah, look, in August, I went into the same mortuary and found out that 1,000 people had died in one month in July. And most of those people who had died were split 50/50 between the Sunnies and the Shiites, but most of them, including women who'd been blindfolded and hands tied behind their backs - I saw the corpses - were both Sunnies and Shiites. Now, I'm not complaining that the *Washington Post* got it wrong - I'm sure there are massacres going on by Shiites - but I think they are going on by militias on both sides. What I'd like to know is who is running the Interior Ministry? Who is paying the Interior Ministry? Who is paying the gunmen who work for the Interior Ministry? I go into the Interior Ministry in Baghdad and I see lots and lots of armed men wearing black leather. Who is paying these guys? Well, we are, of course. The money isn't falling out of the sky. It's coming from the occupation powers and Iraqi's Government, which we effectively run because, as we know, they can't even create a constitution without the American and British ambassadors being present. We need to look at this story in a different light. That narrative that we're getting - that there are death squads and that the Iraqis are all going to kill each other, the idea that the whole society is going to commit mass suicide - is not possible, it's not logical. There is something else going on in Iraq. Don't ask me to...

TONY JONES: Alright. But...

ROBERT FISK: Yeah, go on.

TONY JONES: No, it does seem to be impossible to explain, but, of course, this is exactly what people were saying in Bosnia before that war started up - that people were too intermarried, that you couldn't separate the community.

ROBERT FISK: Iraqi is not Bosnia. Iraqi is not Bosnia. Iraqi is not Bosnia. Iraqi is not Bosnia. We discovered here in Lebanon - and this city I'm talking to you from - that, during the civil war, which lasted from 1975 to 1990 and killed 150,000 people, that there were many outside powers involved in promoting death squads and militias here, and paying militias, not just Arab powers, but European powers were involved in stirring the pot in Lebanon. I think we're being very naive. Just because I can't give you the detail, like, of who ordered this death squad, doesn't prevent us saying that something is wrong with the narrative we're being given the press, from the West, from the Americans, from the Iraqi Government. There is something going wrong. Iraqis are not suicidal people. They don't go

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around blowing up mosques every day. It's not a natural thing for them to do. It's never happened before. I can't say to you, "Well, ok, here is the person who killed this person, or here's the person who left this explosive truck." All I am saying to you is that it is time we said, "Hang on a minute, this is not how it looks."

TONY JONES: What if you put Iran into this equation, because, as we all know, Iran is under tremendous pressure from the West and particularly from the United States at the moment. It has links to these Shia militias and, possibly, links too, to these people you are talking about in the Interior Ministry.

ROBERT FISK: No, no, no, that's wrong. The Iranians link is with the Iraqi Government. The main parties in the government of Iraq which have been elected, who are there now dealing with the Americans, these are the representatives of Iran. Moqtada al-Sadr is irrelevant to Iran. Iranians are already effectively controlling Iraq because the two major power blocks, the two major parties who were elected and who Bush has just been talking to, these are effectively the representatives of Tehran. That's the point. Iran doesn't need to get involved in violence in Iraq.

TONY JONES: Unless the pressure from the United States ratchets up on Iran to the point where there are military threats against these nuclear facilities. Could it not therefore create havoc in Iraq?

ROBERT FISK: Well, you could say the same about Syria, too, couldn't you? And, of course the Americans are also accusing Syria of supporting the insurgents or letting them cross the border. But I think it's much more complicated than that. For example, my sources in this area, who are pretty good, tell me that the Americans have already talked to the Syrians and are trying to do a deal with them to try and get the Syrians to help them over the insurgency and the price of Syria's help, I'm told, is that the Americans will ease off on the UN committee of inquiry into the murder of ex-prime minister Rafiq Hariri, here in Beirut, only a few hundred metres from here, on the 14th February last year. You know, if the Americans are going to get out of Iraq - and they must get out, they will - they need the help of Iran and Syria. And I think you'll find that certain elements within the State Department are already trying to work on that. Now, we hear the rhetoric coming from Bush. I mean, he's got an absolute black-hole chaos in Iraq, he's got Afghanistan - not an inspiration to the world, it's been taken over effectively by narco warlords, many who work for Karzai, the man who's just been making jokes about the Afghan welcome for Bush - and Bush wants another conflict with Iran? I don't think the Americans are in any footing or any ability, military or otherwise, to have another war or to have another crisis in that region. They're in the deepest hole politically, militarily and economically in Iraq. The fact that the White House and the Pentagon and the State Department seem to be in a state of denial doesn't change that. We had Condoleezza Rice here - literally in that building behind me - a few days ago saying that there are great changes taking place in the Middle East - optimistically. Well,

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sure, there is a mosque war going on in Iraq with the Americans up to their feet in the sand, there's an Iranian crisis, or so we're told, the Saudis are frightened the Iraq war will spill over into Saudi Arabia, the Egyptians don't know how to reconcile Syria and Lebanon, there are increasing sectarian tensions here in Lebanon. You would think that someone is building what used to be called Potemkin villages, you know, these extraordinary things that Catherine the Great's court favourites use to build, facades of villages, so that everything looked nice in Russia even though things were barbarous behind the facades. I mean, this is a barbarous world we're living in now in the Middle East. It's never been so dangerous here, either for journalists or soldiers but most of all for Arabs. Hence the thousands of people in the mortuary.

TONY JONES: Robert Fisk, I am afraid we are out of time. We'll have to leave it there and the rest of the discussion on Iran, I suspect, we'll have to have when you're in Australia in the near future. Good luck in Beirut.

ROBERT FISK: (Laughs) Good place to have it! You're welcome.

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- [Phoenix and the Salvador Option - Non-transparent CIA 'precedents' in Iraq's torrent of bloodshed \(16 Sept 2005\)](#)

Imad Khadduri, Friday, September 16, 2005

Phoenix and the Salvador Option - Non-transparent CIA 'precedents' in Iraq's torrent of bloodshed

"Developed by the Central Intelligence Agency in 1967, the Phoenix Program is considered the single-greatest American human-rights aberration of the Vietnam War.

Its purpose was to "neutralize" the Vietcong infrastructure. (emphasis added)

As Valentine underlines, due process was completely non-existent under the Phoenix Program and suspects, real or imagined, could be murdered, blackmailed, tortured or detained at will. At one point the program imposed monthly "neutralization" quotas that led to further abuses in the field. The number of victims was never established but is estimated at between 40,000 and 60,000, of which many were innocent.

While recruitment for the Phoenix Program spread across all the branches of the US government, not all those approached accepted to serve. One Air Force officer who refused as a matter of conscience was Jacques Klein, who later rose to the rank of general and became one of the most respected UN troubleshooters in conflict areas. French-born, Klein reportedly commented that he would not join Phoenix because the means and methods used were "similar to those used by the Nazis in World War

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II".

[Refugees awaken ghosts of Vietnam](#) September 14, 2005

Thememoryhole.org describes the [Phoenix Program](#) in Vietnam as follows: "Created by the CIA in Saigon in 1967, Phoenix was a program aimed at 'neutralizing' - through assassination, kidnapping, and systematic torture - the civilian infrastructure that supported the Viet Cong insurgency in South Vietnam. It was a terrifying 'final solution' that violated the Geneva Conventions and traditional American ideas of human morality."

"The following article examines evidence that the '**Salvador Option**' for Iraq has been ongoing for some time and attempts to say what such an option will mean.

It pays particular attention to the role of the Special Police Commandos, considering both the background of their US liaisons and their deployment in Iraq.

The article also looks at the evidence for death-squad style massacres in Iraq and draws attention to the almost complete absence of investigation. As such, the article represents an initial effort to compile and examine some of these mass killings and is intended to spur others into further looking at the evidence.

Finally, the article turns away from the notion that sectarianism is a sufficient explanation for the violence in Iraq, locating it structurally at the hands of the state as part of the ongoing economic subjugation of Iraq."

[For Iraq, "The Salvador Option" Becomes Reality](#) June 2, 2005

The above subject matter was dealt with previously on this site:

[CIA terrorism in Iraq ... Who? US?](#) June 1, 2005

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- [Revealed: grim world of new Iraqi torture camps \(03 July 2005\)](#)

Secret torture chambers, the brutal interrogation of prisoners, murders by paramilitaries with links to powerful ministries... Foreign affairs editor Peter Beaumont in Baghdad uncovers a grim trail of abuse carried out by forces loyal to the new Iraqi government

- [Peter Beaumont](#) in Baghdad
- [The Observer](#),
- Sunday July 3 2005
- Article history

This article appeared in [the Observer](#) on Sunday July 03 2005 . It was last updated at 02:22 on July 03 2005.

The video camera pans across Hassan an-Ni'ami's body as it is washed in the mosque for burial. In life he was a slender, good-looking man, usually dressed in a dark robe and white turban, Imam at a mosque in Baghdad's Adhimiya district and a senior official of the Muslim Clerics Association.

When I first interviewed him a year ago he was suspected of contacts with the insurgency. Certainly he supported resistance to US forces.

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More recently, an-Ni'ami had dropped out of sight. Then, a little over a month ago, relatives say, paramilitary police commandos from 'Rapid Intrusion' found him at a family home in the Sha'ab neighbourhood of northern Baghdad. His capture was reported on television as that of a senior 'terrorist commander'. Twelve hours later his body turned up in the morgue.

What happened to him in his 24 hours in captivity was written across his body in chapters of pain, recorded by the camera. There are police-issue handcuffs still attached to one wrist, from which he was hanged long enough to cause his hands and wrists to swell. There are burn marks on his chest, as if someone has placed something very hot near his right nipple and moved it around.

A little lower are a series of horizontal welts, wrapping around his body and breaking the skin as they turn around his chest, as if he had been beaten with something flexible, perhaps a cable. There are other injuries: a broken nose and smaller wounds that look like cigarette burns.

An arm appears to have been broken and one of the higher vertebrae is pushed inwards. There is a cluster of small, neat circular wounds on both sides of his left knee. At some stage an-Ni'ami seems to have been efficiently knee-capped. It was not done with a gun - the exit wounds are identical in size to the entry wounds, which would not happen with a bullet. Instead it appears to have been done with something like a drill.

What actually killed him however were the bullets fired into his chest at close range, probably by someone standing over him as he lay on the ground. The last two hit him in the head.

The gruesome detail is important. Hanging by the arms in cuffs, scorching of the body with something like an iron and knee-capping are claimed to be increasingly prevalent in the new Iraq. Now evidence is emerging that appears to substantiate those claims. Not only Iraqis make the allegations. International officials describe the methods in disgusted but hushed tones, laying them at the door of the increasingly unaccountable forces attached to Iraq's Ministry of the Interior.

The only question that remains is the level of the co-ordination of the abuse: whether Iraq is stumbling towards a policy of institutionalised torture or whether these are incidents carried out by rogue elements.

Six months ago, Human Rights Watch (HRW) laid out a catalogue of alleged abuses being applied to those suspected of terrorism in Iraq and called for an independent complaints body in Iraq.

But as the insurgency has grown hotter, so too, it appears, have been the methods employed in the dirty counter-insurgency war.

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To add to HRW's allegations of beatings, electric shocks, arbitrary arrest, forced confessions and detention without trial, The Observer can add its own charges. These include the most brutal kinds of torture, with methods resurrected from the time of Saddam; of increasingly widespread extra-judicial executions; and of the existence of a 'ghost' network of detention facilities - in parallel with those officially acknowledged - that exist beyond all accountability to international human rights monitors, NGOs and even human rights officials of the new Iraqi government.

What is most shocking is that it is done under the noses of US and UK officials, some of whom admit that they are aware of the abuses being perpetrated by units who are diverting international funding to their dirty war.

Hassan an-Ni'ami may well have been a terrorist. Or he may have had knowledge of that terrorism. Or he may have been someone who objected too loudly to foreign troops being in Iraq. We will never know. He had no opportunity to defend himself, no lawyer, no trial. His interrogation and killing were a breach of international law.

And it is not only the case of an-Ni'ami but others too, all arrested by units of the Ministry of the Interior, many of whom were tortured and subsequently killed. Post-mortem images show a dozen or so farmers from the insurgent hotbed of Medayeen who were apparently seized by police as they slept in one of Baghdad's markets and whose bodies were discovered on a rubbish dump in shallow graves to the north of the city. Like an-Ni'ami, their bodies also bore the marks of extensive torture before execution, most with a bullet to the head.

The face of the first body is blackened by strangulation or asphyxiation. Another has bruises to his forehead where he was been hit repeatedly with something heavy. Yet another, his hands still tied with cord, has been punched in the eye and had his ankle fractured. Yet another shows signs of burning similar to an-Ni'ami's. The last two have identical puncture wounds, fist-width apart, suggesting the use of a spiked knuckle-duster.

Then there is Tahar Mohammed Suleiman al-Mashhadani, seized from the Abu Ghraib neighbourhood from early prayers outside a mosque with a number of other men, again by paramilitary police from Rapid Intrusion. When his body was found by family members in the morgue - 20 days after his arrest - he had been tortured almost beyond recognition.

These are not isolated cases. For what is extraordinary is the sense of impunity with which the torture, intimidation and murder is taking place. It is not just in Baghdad. In the majority Shia south, far from the worst ravages of the insurgency, there are also emerging reports consistent with the abuses in the capital.

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If there is a centre to this horror, it is Baghdad's Ministry of the Interior, and the police commando units that operate from there.

The ministry is a strange, top-heavy building, set apart in an area of open ground off the highway. Its entrance is guarded by concrete blast-walls and endless checkpoints on the dusty road that leads to its crowded reception.

I came here almost exactly a year ago, two days after sovereignty had been handed back to Iraq's interim government. The floors were occupied by civil servants and blue-uniformed officers of the Iraqi Police Service. It was easy to wander in.

These days the ministry is a very different place. The dusty hinterland that leads to it is busy with the new paramilitary forces that most often have been accused of human rights abuses - the Rapid Intrusion brigades, most notoriously the Wolf Brigade of 'Abu Walid'. There has been no investigation or official findings over the allegations.

It was here - 12 months ago - that there was the first intimation that something was going seriously wrong. On the second day of Iraq's new government, US military police were forced to raid the Guest House to 'rescue' dozens of alleged criminals, scooped up in a sweep of the city, who were being subjected to beatings and forced confessions of their crimes.

Back then officials were happy to justify the violence - and angry at the US intervention. Criminals and terrorists expected a good beating, one official said, proud of his 100 per cent confession rate.

Now it is impossible to reach those officials as they shelter on heavily guarded floors. There are no American MPs to come to the aid of those locked in the cells.

A year ago, the worst violence was meted out in the Guest House. Now officials say the abuse happens on the seventh floor, where those suspected of terrorist connections are brought.

One of those held at the ministry for 'terrorist interrogation' is 'Zaid'. It is not his real name. Since his release, the 25-year-old Sunni from the western suburbs of Baghdad lives in fear of being brought back.

A taxi driver, the college graduate stopped his car in March to buy food in a market. When a bomb exploded nearby, he went to look at the damage. Arrested at the scene by soldiers from the Iraqi National Guard, he says he was handed over to the Ministry of the Interior.

At first, said Zaid, he was put in a room, on the seventh floor, measuring 10ft by 12ft, with 60 others. He was crammed in so tightly he could not sit. In some respects Zaid was lucky. Early in his detention,

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a Ministry of Justice official appeared and, furious at the conditions, demanded the men be moved. 'He said, "You can't have this many people in a room this size," so they moved us to somewhere with more air and fed us. He asked too whether there had been any beatings and some said yes.'

For his part, Zaid says he was hung by his arms, but not for so long that it caused any permanent damage. His ordeal was largely to be subjected to threats of violence as up to eight guards circled him during his interrogation. But Zaid claims he witnessed what happened to men brought from another detention facility, a barracks run by the Wolf Brigade, who were kept in the same area as Zaid until his parents paid a hefty bribe for his release.

'I saw men from Samarra [another insurgent stronghold] and from Medayeen. Some appeared to have wounds to their legs,' he recalled. 'There were others who could not use their spoon properly. They had to hold it between their palms and move their heads to the spoon.'

His month in the ministry terrified Zaid. If the police came again for him, he said, he would rather throw himself off a balcony than go back. Zaid is not the first detainee to accuse the police of taking bribes for the release of prisoners. It is a common charge, as are descriptions of prisoners being brought from other, less accountable, interrogation facilities where the worst of the violence is taking place.

What is most important about Zaid's testimony is that it makes clear a link exists between the Ministry of Interior and the torture being conducted out of sight at other centres. Iraqi and international officials named several of these centres, including al-Hadoud prison in the Kharkh district of Baghdad.

A second torture centre is said to be located in the basement of a clinic in the Shoula district, while the Wolf Brigade is accused of running its own interrogation centre - said to be one of the worst - at its Nissor Square headquarters. Other places where abusive interrogations have been alleged include al-Muthana airbase and the old National Security headquarters.

'Abu Ali', a 30-year-old Sunni scooped up in a mosque raid in central Baghdad, was taken to the latter for a week in mid-May where he says he was beaten on his feet, subjected to hanging by his arms and, when he angered his guards by refusing to confess, threatened with being sat on 'the bottle' - being anally penetrated.

It is not just in Baghdad. Credible reports exist of Arab prisoners in Kirkuk being moved to secret detention facilities in Kurdistan, while other centres are alleged in Samarra, in the Holy Cities and in Basra in the south.

'There are places we can get to and know about,' said one Iraqi official. 'But there are dozens of other places we know about where there is no access at all.'

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'It is impossible to keep track of detentions, and what is happening to people when they are taken away,' complained one foreign official involved in trying to building Iraq's respect for human rights.

'On top of that we have a whole culture that is permitting torture. The impression is the judiciary are simply not interested in responding to the issue of human rights. It is depressing.'

But it is not simply the issue of keeping track of where detainees are being taken that is a problem. Accountability has also become more opaque since the formation of the Shia-dominated government of Ibrahim Jaffari with ministers and senior officials at the Ministry of the Interior refusing to meet concerned international organisations including Human Rights Watch.

'We have been trying to break through to someone responsible to express our concerns,' said another international official.

'But it is impossible to meet the people we really need to see. What is so worrying is that allegations concerning the use of drills and irons during torture just keep coming back. And we have seen precisely the same evidence of torture on bodies that have turned up after they have been arrested. There is a dirty counter-insurgency war, led on the anti-insurgency side by groups responsible to different leaders. People are not appearing in court. Instead, what is happening to them is totally arbitrary.'

There is a significance to all this that goes beyond the everyday horror of today's Iraq. In the absence of weapons of mass destruction, the human rights abuses of Saddam Hussein's regime became more important as a subsidiary case for war.

It has been a theme that has been constantly reiterated: it was horrific then, and it is better now. The second may still just be true. In many aspects there may be some improvement, but the trajectory of Iraq now on human rights is in danger of undermining that last plank of justification.

True, there is a question of scale of the abuses. What is also different from Saddam's era is that Iraq is now host to multinational troops, to huge UK and US missions, and is a substantial recipient of foreign aid, including British and EU funds.

British and US police and military officials act as advisers to Iraq's security forces. Foreign troops support Iraqi policing missions. What is extraordinary is that despite the increasingly widespread evidence of torture, governments have remained silent. It is all the more extraordinary on the British side, as embassy officials have been briefed by senior Iraqi officials over the allegations on a number of occasions and individual cases of abuse have been raised with British diplomats.

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In Iraq's Ministry of Human Rights, close to the Communications Tower and the location of one of the secret interrogation centres, they were marking the international day for the victims of torture. As officials gathered for chocolate cake and cola under posters that read 'Non to torture', some senior officials are in no doubt that torture in their country is again getting worse.

The deputy minister, Aida Ussayran, is a life-long human rights activist who returned from exile in Britain to take up this post. She concedes that abuses by Iraq's security forces have been getting worse even as her ministry has been trying to re-educate the Iraqi police and army to respect detainee rights.

'As you know, for a long time Iraq was a mass grave for human rights,' she says. 'The challenge is that many people who committed these abuses are still there and there is a culture of abuse in the security forces and police - even the army - that needs to be addressed. I do not have a magic solution, but what I can do is to remind people that this kind of behaviour is what creates terrorists.'

There is a sense of frustration too in the Ministry of Human Rights, for even as the security forces rapidly increase in size, the ministry tasked with checking abuses has only 24 monitors to pursue cases, at a time when officials believe it needs hundreds to keep Iraq's police and army effectively in check.

If Ussayran is robust about her country's problems with human rights abuses, others are convinced that, far from being the acts of rogue units, the abuse is being committed at the behest of the ministry itself - or at least senior officials within it.

'There are people in the ministry who want to use these means,' said one. 'It is in their ideology. It is their strategy. They do not understand anything else. They believe that human rights and the Convention against Torture are stupid.'

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- [US Knight Ridder Exposes Systematic Torture, Murder Iraqi Sunnis; Writer Pays With Life \(29 June 2005\)](#)

30th June 2005, 05:31 pm by Stan



Motto of the sniper: One shot, one kill. It worked with Yasser Salihee. A single, well-aimed shot to the head killed him.

US Knight Ridder Exposes Systematic Torture, Murder Iraqi Sunnis; Writer Pays With Life
Jun 29, 2005

By Muhammad Abu Nasr, Free Arab Voice; Edited For Publication By JUS

Months after the stories began to surface in uncensored press, now American Knight Ridder newspaper has reported that so-called Iraqi security forces have been torturing and killing Iraqi Sunnis.

A story by Tom Lasseter and Yasser Salihee written for Knight Ridder was published on Monday 27 June 2005 and reported that days after Iraq's new Shi'a -led [puppet] government was announced on April 28, the bodies of Sunni Muslim men began turning up at the capital's central morgue after the men had been detained by people wearing Iraqi police uniforms.

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The American agency reported that Fayiq Baqr, the director and chief forensic investigator at the central Baghdad morgue, said that the corpses first caught his attention because the men appeared to have been killed in methodical fashion. Their hands had been tied or handcuffed behind their backs, their eyes were blindfolded and they appeared to have been tortured. In most cases the dead men looked as if they had been whipped with a cord, subjected to electric shocks, beaten with a blunt object and shot to death, often with single bullets to their heads.

The American news report said that marks on those bodies were similar to injuries found on prisoners that the so-called Iraqi ministry for human rights, prodded by families of victims, rescued from secret prisons run by the interior ministry according to family accounts and medical records.

Knight Ridder reported that American occupation authorities and collaborating Iraqi officials said that the so-called police murders are “not being investigated systematically”. The agency said, however, that in dozens of interviews with families and officials, and through a review of medical records a Knight Ridder reporter and two special correspondents found more than 30 examples of this type of killing in less than a week. They include 12 cases with specific dates, times, names, and witnesses who said they would be willing to come forward if asked to do so by the installed authorities.

The so-called ministry of the interior which oversees the Iraqi police, denied any involvement in the murders, Knight Ridder reported. But eyewitnesses said that many of the dead were apprehended by large groups of men driving white Toyota Land Cruisers with [puppet] police markings. Knight Ridder reported that “The men were wearing police commando uniforms and bulletproof vests, carrying expensive 9-millimeter Glock pistols and using sophisticated radios, the witnesses said.”

American occupation officials cover up the systematic murders claiming that the victims were killed by resistance fighters dressed as puppet police. American Steven Casteel, a senior US adviser to the so-called ministry of the interior and a former American Drug Enforcement Administration intelligence chief, admitted that the puppet forces at times abused detainees but denied reports of systematic sectarian abduction and murder by his charges. When Knight Ridder attempted to contact the “interior minister” to get his comment on the reports, the agency was told that the “minister” “could not schedule an interview.

The so-called “ministry of human right”, though more accepting of the stories, was similarly evasive about the matter of placing blame for the murders.

Ra'd Sultan, an official in puppet “ministry of human rights”, whose job is to monitor the treatment of Iraqis in prisons and detention centers, said some “interior ministry” employees have tortured Iraqis whom they suspected of supporting the Resistance.

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For one thing, officials in the interior ministry's intelligence division deny having any detainees, at all, claiming that they only question inmates in Iraqi prisons. But one investigation by the so-called "human rights ministry" found 32 detainees and another found 67 in "interior ministry" intelligence facilities. "The majority of the detainees had been tortured," Knight Ridder quoted Sultan as saying.

Knight Ridder reported that "most of those who were tortured had their hands cuffed behind their backs, were blindfolded and had been beaten by cords or subjected to electrical shock, Sultan said." The American news agency noted that Fayiq Baqr, at the morgue, said the bodies that have been brought to him handcuffed and blindfolded had been similarly abused.

But when it came to assigning blame for the torture and murder, the human rights official was evasive. Knight Ridder quoted Sultan as saying, when battered corpses turn up outside "interior ministry" facilities, How can I prove it is the security forces who were guilty of the torture and murder?

While it is evident to forensic investigator Fayiq Baqr what is going on, he too fears to state bluntly what is going on. Knight Ridder reported that "asked who he thought was behind the upsurge in such executions, Baqr said, " It is a very delicate subject for society when you are blaming the [puppet] police officers. . . . It is not an easy issue.â€ But Baqr cites the clear evidence of what is going on: â€œWe hear that they are captured by the police and then the bodies are found killed . . . it's obviously increasing.

In fact the abductions, tortures and murders have been increasing at an overwhelming rate. Knight Ridder reported that Baqr said he had been unable to catalog the deaths because so many bodies have been brought through his morgue and because he doesn't have enough doctors.

Before March 2003, he said, the morgue handled 200 to 250 suspicious deaths a month, about 16 of which included firearm injuries. He said he now sees 700 to 800 suspicious deaths a month, with some 500 having firearm wounds.

Many Iraqis say the giveaway that the abductors are at least connected to the police is the preponderance of reports involving Land Cruisers, Glocks and other expensive equipment.

Knight Ridder reported that on May 5, for example, 14 Sunni farmers were picked up from an east Baghdad vegetable market. The farmers had driven to the capital from al-Mada'in, a town south of Baghdad where the month before the puppet regime had concocted a false story about Resistance fighters kidnapping and executing Shi'a, a story that later proved to be fabricated in an operation blamed on Iranian intelligence.

The bodies of the farmers were discovered in shallow graves the next day, Knight Ridder reported. They had been blindfolded and tortured, and their hands had been cuffed behind their backs.

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In separate interviews this week, Knight Ridder reported, two men who were at the east Baghdad market at the time said they saw a large group of puppet police detain the farmers.

“A patrol of more than 10 police vehicles drove up and parked,” said Ali Karim, a fruit vendor. “ They were running through the street with their guns, saying that the farmers had a car bomb with them. They pushed them against the walls and asked them for their IDs.

Knight Ridder reported that another vendor, Ahmed Adil, gave a similar account in a separate interview.

“We were sitting,” Knight Ridder reported Adil as saying, and the [puppet] police cars pulled up and spread in different directions. A neighborhood guard asked the [puppet] police what they were doing - he said these are just farmers - and the police said don't get involved, they have a car bomb with them.â€

A brigadier general in the so-called “interior ministry,” who spoke to Knight Ridder on the condition of anonymity, said his brother was taken during a large raid on May 14 in his working-class Sunni neighborhood in western Baghdad. The brother's body was found a day later, bearing signs of torture.

The general, who was not present when his brother was detained, said he canvassed the neighborhood and interviewed one family after the next.

The descriptions of the abductors were identical in every case, he said: They came in white police Toyota Land Cruisers, wore [puppet] police commando uniforms, flak vests and helmets. They also had Glocks.

Knight Ridder reported that the general said he had tried, through the “interior ministry,” to find out which commando unit was in that neighborhood when his brother disappeared. He also said colleagues have told him that his own life is now in danger.

A day before the general's brother disappeared in west Baghdad, Anwar Jasim, a Sunni welder at the puppet so-called “Iraqi ministry of industry and minerals” went missing from his south Baghdad home.

Knight Ridder reported that Jasim's family said he was taken by a large group of men dressed and equipped like puppet police commandos.

Another man taken in Jasim's neighborhood, a local grocer who gave his name as Abu Ahmad, said he was taken to the same detention facility as Jasim. While he was there, he said, he and other men sat on the floor blindfolded and handcuffed. They listened to other prisoners screaming.

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When the other prisoners were brought back into the room, Abu Ahmad said, they said they'd been pummeled with long wooden staffs.

“When we were in detention, they put blindfolds and handcuffs on us. On the second day, the soldiers were saying, “He’s dead,” said Abu Ahmad. “Later, we found out it was Anwar.”

Knight Ridder reported that the abductors dropped Jasim’s body at Baghdad’s al-Yarmuk hospital the next day, hospital staffers said. According to hospital records, Jasim had a bullet wound in the back of his head and cuts and bruises on his abdomen, back and neck.

The man in charge of the al-Yarmuk morgue, who gave his name as Abu Amir, said he remembers the day the commandos brought Jasim’s corpse.

“The commandos told me to keep the body outside of the refrigerator so that the dogs could eat it because he’s a terrorist and he deserves it,” Abu Amir said, according to the Knight Ridder Reporters.

The killings didn’t stop in May, Knight Ridder noted.

Sa’di Khalif’s body was also found at al-Yarmuk. The 52-year-old Sunni, along with his brother Muhammad, was taken from his home in western Baghdad on June 10. His abductors rode up in pickup trucks painted with Iraqi puppet police insignia, his family said. About 10 came into the house, while about twice as many fanned out in the street outside, forming a security perimeter. They had radios, uniforms, flak vests and helmets, family members said.

“The doctor told us he was choked and tortured before they shot him”, said Ahmad Khalif, one of Saâ’diâ’s brothers. He looked like he had been dragged by a car.

Muhammad Khalif, 47, also beaten and shot, still had on metal handcuffs at the al-Yarmuk morgue.

The Knight Ridder report concluded by noting that Yasser Salihee was a special correspondent who worked on the report. He was shot and killed last week in Baghdad in circumstances that remain unclear. Special correspondent Mohammed al Dulaimy also contributed to the report from Baghdad, Knight Ridder added.

“Yasser Salihee, 30, was killed while driving alone in Baghdad on June 24, his day off. A single bullet pierced his windshield and struck him in the head. It appeared that a U.S. sniper shot him.” - The Guardian, June 30, 2005.

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Salihee's widow at his funeral

- **[Bush's 'Death Squads' \(11 Jan 2005\)](#)**

Refusing to admit personal misjudgments on Iraq, George W. Bush instead is pushing the United States toward becoming what might be called a permanent “counter-terrorist” state, which uses torture, cross-border death squads and even collective punishments to defeat perceived enemies in Iraq and around the world.

Since securing a second term, Bush has pressed ahead with this hard-line strategy, in part by removing dissidents inside his administration while retaining or promoting his protégés. Bush also has started prepping his younger brother Jeb as a possible successor in 2008, which could help extend George W.’s war policies while keeping any damaging secrets under the Bush family’s control.

As a centerpiece of this tougher strategy to pacify Iraq, Bush is contemplating the adoption of the brutal practices that were used to suppress leftist peasant uprisings in Central America in the 1980s. The Pentagon is “intensively debating” a new policy for Iraq called the “Salvador option,” [Newsweek](#) magazine reported on Jan. 9.

The strategy is named after the Reagan-Bush administration’s “still-secret strategy” of supporting El Salvador’s right-wing security forces, which operated clandestine “death squads” to eliminate both

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leftist guerrillas and their civilian sympathizers, Newsweek reported. “Many U.S. conservatives consider the policy to have been a success – despite the deaths of innocent civilians,” Newsweek wrote.

Central America Veterans

The magazine also noted that a number of Bush administration officials were leading figures in the Central American operations of the 1980s, such as John Negroponte, who was then U.S. Ambassador to Honduras and is now U.S. Ambassador to Iraq.

Other current officials who played key roles in Central America include Elliott Abrams, who oversaw Central American policies at the State Department and who is now a Middle East adviser on Bush’s National Security Council staff, and Vice President Dick Cheney, who was a powerful defender of the Central American policies while a member of the House of Representatives.

The insurgencies in El Salvador and Guatemala were crushed through the slaughter of tens of thousands of civilians. In Guatemala, about 200,000 people perished, including what a truth commission later termed a genocide against Mayan Indians in the Guatemalan highlands. In El Salvador, about 70,000 died including massacres of whole villages, such as the slaughter carried out by a U.S.-trained battalion against hundreds of men, women and children in and around the town of El Mozote in 1981.

The Reagan-Bush strategy also had a domestic component, the so-called “perception management” operation that employed sophisticated propaganda to manipulate the fears of the American people while hiding the ugly reality of the wars. The Reagan-Bush administration justified its actions in Central America by portraying the popular uprisings as an attempt by the Soviet Union to establish a beachhead in the Americas to threaten the U.S. southern border.

[For details about how these strategies worked and the role of George H.W. Bush, see Robert Parry’s [*Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq*](#).]

More Pain

By employing the “Salvador option” in Iraq, the U.S. military would crank up the pain, especially in Sunni Muslim areas where resistance to the U.S. occupation of Iraq has been strongest. In effect, Bush would assign other Iraqi ethnic groups the job of leading the “death squad” campaign against the Sunnis.

“One Pentagon proposal would send Special Forces teams to advise, support and possibly train Iraqi squads, most likely hand-picked Kurdish Perhmerga fighters and Shiite militiamen, to target Sunni

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insurgents and their sympathizers, even across the border into Syria, according to military insiders familiar with discussions,” Newsweek reported.

Newsweek quoted one military source as saying, “The Sunni population is paying no price for the support it is giving the terrorists. ... From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation.”

Citing the Central American experiences of many Bush administration officials, we wrote in November 2003 – more than a year ago – that many of these Reagan-Bush veterans were drawing lessons from the 1980s in trying to cope with the Iraqi insurgency. We pointed out, however, that the conditions were not parallel. [See Consortiumnews.com’s [“Iraq: Quicksand & Blood.”](#)]

In Central America, powerful oligarchies had long surrounded themselves with ruthless security forces and armies. So, when uprisings swept across the region in the early 1980s, the Reagan-Bush administration had ready-made – though unsavory – allies who could do the dirty work with financial and technological help from Washington.

Iraqi Dynamic

A different dynamic exists in Iraq, because the Bush administration chose to disband rather than co-opt the Iraqi army. That left U.S. forces with few reliable local allies and put the onus for carrying out counterinsurgency operations on American soldiers who were unfamiliar with the land, the culture and the language.

Those problems, in turn, contributed to a series of counterproductive tactics, including the heavy-handed round-ups of Iraqi suspects, the torturing of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, and the killing of innocent civilians by jittery U.S. troops fearful of suicide bombings.

The war in Iraq also has undermined U.S. standing elsewhere in the Middle East and around the world. Images of U.S. soldiers sexually abusing Iraqi prisoners, putting bags over the heads of captives and shooting a wounded insurgent have blackened America’s image everywhere and made cooperation with the United States increasingly difficult even in countries long considered American allies.

Beyond the troubling images, more and more documents have surfaced indicating that the Bush administration had adopted limited forms of torture as routine policy, both in Iraq and the broader War on Terror. Last August, an FBI counterterrorism official criticized abusive practices at the prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba.

“On a couple of occasions, I entered interview rooms to find a detainee chained hand and foot in a fetal position to the floor, with no chair, food or water. Most times they had urinated or defecated on

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themselves, and had been left there for 18-24 hours or more,” the official wrote. “When I asked the M.P.’s what was going on, I was told that interrogators from the day prior had ordered this treatment, and the detainee was not to be moved. On another occasion ... the detainee was almost unconscious on the floor, with a pile of hair next to him. He had apparently been literally pulling his own hair out throughout the night.”

Despite official insistence that torture is not U.S. policy, the blame for these medieval tactics continues to climb the chain of command toward the Oval Office. It appears to have been Bush’s decision after the Sept. 11 attacks to “take the gloves off,” a reaction understandable at the time but which now appears to have hurt, more than helped.

TV World

Many Americans have fantasized about how they would enjoy watching Osama bin Laden tortured to death for his admitted role in the Sept. 11 attacks. There is also a tough-guy fondness for torture as shown in action entertainment – like Fox Network’s “24” – where torture is a common-sense shortcut to get results.

But the larger danger arises when the exceptional case becomes the routine, when it’s no longer the clearly guilty al-Qaeda mass murderer, but it is now the distraught Iraqi father trying to avenge the death of his child killed by American bombs.

Rather than the dramatic scenes on TV, the reality is usually more like that desperate creature in Guantanamo lying in his own waste and pulling out his hair. The situation can get even worse when torture takes on the industrial quality of government policy, with subjects processed through the gulags or the concentration camps.

That also is why the United States and other civilized countries have long banned torture and prohibited the intentional killing of civilians. The goal of international law has been to set standards that couldn’t be violated even in extreme situations or in the passions of the moment.

Yet, Bush – with his limited world experience – was easily sold on the notion of U.S. “exceptionalism” where America’s innate goodness frees it from the legal constraints that apply to lesser countries.

Bush also came to believe in the wisdom of his “gut” judgments. After his widely praised ouster of Afghanistan’s Taliban government in late 2001, Bush set his sights on invading Iraq. Like a hot gambler in Las Vegas doubling his bets, Bush’s instincts were on a roll.

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Now, however, as the Iraqi insurgency continues to grow and inflict more casualties on both U.S. troops and Iraqis who have thrown in their lot with the Americans, Bush finds himself facing a narrowing list of very tough choices.

Bush could acknowledge his mistakes and seek international help in extricating U.S. forces from Iraq. But Bush abhors admitting errors, even small ones. Plus, Bush's belligerent tone hasn't created much incentive for other countries to bail him out.

Instead Bush appears to be upping the ante by contemplating cross-border raids into countries neighboring Iraq. He also would be potentially expanding the war by having Iraqi Kurds and Shiites kill Sunnis, a prescription for civil war or genocide.

Pinochet Option

There's a personal risk, too, for Bush if he picks the "Salvador option." He could become an American version of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet or Guatemala's Efraim Rios Montt, leaders who turned loose their security forces to commit assassinations, "disappear" opponents and torture captives.

Like the policy that George W. Bush is now considering, Pinochet even sponsored his own international "death squad" – known as Operation Condor – that hunted down political opponents around the world. One of those attacks in September 1976 blew up a car carrying Chilean dissident Orlando Letelier as he drove through Washington D.C. with two American associates. Letelier and co-worker Ronni Moffitt were killed.

With the help of American friends in high places, the two former dictators have fended off prison until now. However, Pinochet and Rios Montt have become pariahs who are facing legal proceedings aimed at finally holding them accountable for their atrocities. [For more on George H.W. Bush's protection of Pinochet, see Parry's [*Secrecy & Privilege*](#).]

One way for George W. Bush to avert that kind of trouble is to make sure his political allies remain in power even after his second term ends in January 2009. In his case, that might be achievable by promoting his brother Jeb for president in 2008, thus guaranteeing that any incriminating documents stay under wraps.

President George W. Bush's dispatching Florida Gov. Jeb Bush to inspect the tsunami damage in Asia started political speculation that one of the reasons was to burnish Jeb's international credentials in a setting where his personal empathy would be on display.

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Though Jeb Bush has insisted that he won't run for president in 2008, the Bush family might find strong reason to encourage Jeb to change his mind, especially if the Iraq War is lingering and George W. has too many file cabinets filled with damaging secrets.

Robert Parry broke many of the Iran-Contra stories in the 1980s for the Associated Press and Newsweek. His new book, *Secrecy & Privilege: Rise of the Bush Dynasty from Watergate to Iraq*, can be ordered at secrecyandprivilege.com. It's also available at Amazon.com, as is his 1999 book, *Lost History: Contras, Cocaine, the Press & 'Project Truth.'*

- [**Death-Squad Democracy \(11 Jan 2005\)**](#)

Christopher Dickey

NEWSWEEK WEB EXCLUSIVE

Updated: 12:11 PM ET Oct 16, 2007

Having watched the slaughter in El Salvador first hand during the early 1980s, having lost many friends and acquaintances to the butchers there--among them nuns, priests and an archbishop who will someday be sainted--and having been targeted myself, I have something of a personal interest in this notion. I'm not about to forget the bodies lying unclaimed in the streets, the families of the victims too afraid to pick them up lest they become targets as well. When I hear talk of a Salvador Option, I can't help but think about El Playon, a wasteland of volcanic rock that was one of the killers' favorite dumping grounds. I've never forgotten the sick-sweet stench of carnal refuse there, the mutilated corpses half-devoured by mongrels and buzzards, the hollow eyes of a human skull peering up through the loose-piled rocks, the hair fallen away from the bone like a gruesome halo.

Still, I'm prepared to admit that building friendly democracies sometimes has to be a cold-blooded business in the shadowland of moral grays that is the real world. The Reagan administration was just doing--or, more often, allowing to be done--whatever it took to defeat a largely Communist insurgency. I'm even prepared to believe that Arena, the political party founded by the late death squad leader, Roberto D'Aubuisson, has long since cleaned up its act. Salvadoran voters returned Arena to power last year for the third time since 1992. Its presidential candidate, Tony Saca, beat former guerrilla leader Shafik Handal by a landslide. Would El Playon's voters have made a difference? Well, we'll never know.

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The question of the moment is not the state of play in El Salvador, however, it's the disaster in Iraq. The Bush administration has a dismal record learning the wrong lessons from the wrong paradigms when it comes to Iraq. This was not the liberation of France, nor the occupation of Germany or Japan, and America's war on terrorists is not the same as Israel's war with the Palestinians. So, let's take a real close look at what we're talking about here when we discuss the Salvador Option.

For starters, what's been written about the NEWSWEEK report by Michael Hirsh and John Barry goes far beyond what the story says. It doesn't suggest for a minute, as the BBC reported, that the Pentagon is looking to create "paramilitary" death squads. It's about the possible training of elite units to snatch or kill very specific insurgent leaders.

In fact, the policy could be a formalization of what's already taking place. "We are, of course, already targeting enemy cadres for elimination whether by capture or death in various places including Afghanistan and Iraq," says Patrick Lang, former chief of Middle East analysis for the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency. According to Lang, so many people in the Special Operations Forces have been caught up in efforts to do just that, there's actually a shortage of Green Berets to do what they're most needed for: training regular Iraqi troops. "Surely," says Lang, "no one except the Jihadis thinks that we should not be hunting enemy leaders and key personnel." But that's not the problem, quite. What those of us in El Salvador learned was that American policy might call for surgical action, but once the local troops are involved, they're as likely to use a chain-saw as a scalpel. And that, too, can serve American ends. In almost any counter-insurgency, the basic message the government or the occupiers tries to get across to the population is brutally simple: "We can protect you from the guerrillas, but the guerrillas can't protect you from us, and you've got to choose sides." Sometimes you can win the population's hearts and minds; sometimes you just have to make them more frightened of you than they are of the insurgents. "That was part of the thinking behind Fallujah," says a well-informed Coalition official, referring to the ferocious offensive that re-took the city in November. "We have only one of the tools so far. That is, 'You can't protect your people from us.' In Fallujah they had a little Salafi state. Well, that's gone now." The city remains in ruins; at least 50 American soldiers lost their lives, as well as hundreds, perhaps thousands of insurgents and civilians. It was a mighty tough lesson to teach. In terms of toe-to-toe urban combat, "that was the heaviest fighting the U.S. has been involved in since 1968," says the same official. Yet the Americans have not managed to protect the Iraqi citizenry from terror and intimidation by the guerrillas. "That's not something we're good at," says the official. His remarks were echoed by a senior U.S. embassy officer, who said the Americans just can't begin to out-intimidate the guerrillas. "It's a lesson we can't teach," says the embassy official. "We're not capable of that." Grabbing here and there for analogies, this guy started talking about what the late Syrian President Hafez Assad did to Sunni fundamentalists holed up in the city of Hama in 1982. Assad flattened a large section of the town. "Short of 'Hama rules,'" the official asked rhetorically, "what do you do?" In Iraq, in fact, as in many other places where the United States has tried to train ethical armies to fight dirty wars, the Iraqi troops are tacitly expected to do what

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American troops won't. A fundamental purpose of the upcoming elections on January 30 is to create democratic legitimacy for whatever extreme measures the newly organized military decides to take. Because we're talking about the supposed Salvador Option, I figured I'd get back in touch with Joaquin Villalobos, El Salvador's most brilliant guerrilla leader. Now at Oxford, he favored the Iraq war in 2003, but is dumbfounded by the direction the conflict has taken. Villalobos was dryly analytical, as ever. "The problem of repression and its possible effectiveness corresponds to five basic elements: proportionality, the scope of the conflict, time, a context that favors a multiplier effect or not, and the ability to control what you're doing." If so, a helluva lot more fine tuning is needed than we're likely to see in Iraq any time soon. "If the generals think that with the hatred against the United States that exists in the region, with the divisions in Iraqi society, with Syria, Iran and others around, starting a dirty war is something that will give them an edge, they are totally and absolutely lost and desperate," says Villalobos. "Invading Iraq without a post-war plan created chaos, subsequent mistakes converted the chaos into organized resistance, and if they keep blundering ahead blindly, they'll convert the resistance into a real civil war." A U.S. official in Baghdad agrees. "We're bleeding from so many self-inflicted wounds," he told me the other day. The Salvador Option would be just one more.

URL: <http://www.newsweek.com/id/47999>

- **[Israel and Death Squads for Iraq \(10 Dec 2003\)](#)**

[Israel trains U.S. assassination squads in Iraq \(09 Dec 2003\)](#)

[Israel helping train U.S. forces to combat Iraqi insurgents \(10 Dec 2003\)](#)

[West Bank of the Tigris \(10 Dec 2003\)](#)

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***BRussells* Tribunal Dossier** **Introduction to the "Salvador option"** **and Iraq's "Death squads" - *PART 4* -**



[Israel trains U.S. assassination squads in Iraq](#)

by Julian Borger, *The Guardian*, December 9, 2003

Israeli advisers are helping train US special forces in aggressive counter-insurgency operations in Iraq, including the use of assassination squads against guerrilla leaders, US intelligence and military sources said yesterday.

The Israeli Defence Force (IDF) has sent urban warfare specialists to Fort Bragg in North Carolina, the home of US special forces, and according to two sources, Israeli military "consultants" have also visited Iraq.

US forces in Iraq's Sunni triangle have already begun to use tactics that echo Israeli operations in the occupied territories, sealing off centres of resistance with razor wire and razing buildings from where attacks have been launched against US troops.

But the secret war in Iraq is about to get much tougher, in the hope of suppressing the Ba'athist-led insurgency ahead of next November's presidential elections.

US special forces teams are already behind the lines inside Syria attempting to kill foreign jihadists before they cross the border, and a group focused on the "neutralisation" of guerrilla leaders is being set up, according to sources familiar with the operations.

"This is basically an assassination programme. That is what is being conceptualised here. This is a hunter-killer team," said a former senior US intelligence official, who added that he feared the new tactics and enhanced cooperation with Israel would only inflame a volatile situation in the Middle East.

"It is bonkers, insane. Here we are -- we're already being compared to Sharon in the Arab world, and we've just confirmed it by bringing in the Israelis and setting up assassination teams."

"They are being trained by Israelis in Fort Bragg," a well-informed intelligence source in Washington said.

"Some Israelis went to Iraq as well, not to do training, but for providing consultations."

The consultants' visit to Iraq was confirmed by another US source who was in contact with American officials there.

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The Pentagon did not return calls seeking comment, but a military planner, Brigadier General Michael Vane, mentioned the cooperation with Israel in a letter to *Army* magazine in July about the Iraq counter-insurgency campaign.

"We recently travelled to Israel to glean lessons learned from their counterterrorist operations in urban areas," wrote General Vane, deputy chief of staff at the army's training and doctrine command.

An Israeli official said the IDF regularly shared its experience in the West Bank and Gaza with the US armed forces, but said he could not comment about cooperation in Iraq.

"When we do activities, the US military attaches in Tel Aviv are interested. I assume it's the same as the British. That's the way allies work. The special forces come to our people and say, do debrief on an operation we have done," the official said.

"Does it affect Iraq? It's not in our interest or the American interest or in anyone's interest to go into that. It would just fit in with jihadist prejudices."

Colonel Ralph Peters, a former army intelligence officer and a critic of Pentagon policy in Iraq, said yesterday there was nothing wrong with learning lessons wherever possible.

"When we turn to anyone for insights, it doesn't mean we blindly accept it," Col Peters said. "But I think what you're seeing is a new realism. The American tendency is to try to win all the hearts and minds. In Iraq, there are just some hearts and minds you can't win. Within the bounds of human rights, if you do make an example of certain villages it gets the attention of the others, and attacks have gone down in the area."

The new counter-insurgency unit made up of elite troops being put together in the Pentagon is called Task Force 121, *New Yorker* magazine reported in yesterday's edition.

One of the planners behind the offensive is a highly controversial figure, whose role is likely to inflame Muslim opinion: Lieutenant General William "Jerry" Boykin.

In October, there were calls for his resignation after he told a church congregation in Oregon that the US was at war with Satan, who "wants to destroy us as a Christian army".

"He's been promoted a rank above his abilities," he said. "Some generals are pretty good on battlefield but are disastrous nearer the source of power."

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[Israel helping train U.S. forces to combat Iraqi insurgents](#)

by Ellis Shuman, *Israel Insider*, 10 December 2003

Israeli advisers are helping train U.S. special forces in aggressive counter-insurgency operations in Iraq, The Guardian reported yesterday. A former U.S. intelligence agent told the paper that the IDF sent urban warfare specialists to Fort Bragg in North Carolina to help set up "assassination teams" that would target guerilla leaders.

Officials at Fort Bragg, however, denied that Israeli advisers had come to the base to train special forces soldiers in counter-insurgency tactics including assassination, the Fayetteville (N.C.) Observer reported today. "This command is not conducting any combined U.S. or Israeli training at Fort Bragg," said Lt. Col. Hans Bush, a spokesman for U.S. Army Special Operations.

But according to American and Israeli military and intelligence officials, Israeli commandos and intelligence units have been working closely with their American counterparts at Fort Bragg and in Israel to help them prepare for operations in Iraq, the *New Yorker* and other media sources reported.

"The Americans now realize their forces are in Iraq for the long haul, and are reorganizing accordingly," a senior Israeli security source told Reuters. "Israel has been providing advice on how to shift from a reliance on heavy, armored occupation troops to mobile forces that are more effective in quelling urban resistance and cause less friction with the general populace," he said.

U.S. forces already have adopted IDF tactics

According to media reports, American forces in Iraq have already begun to use tactics that echo Israeli operations in the Palestinian territories, including the sealing off centers of resistance with razor wire and razing buildings from where attacks have been launched against U.S. troops.

Reuters reported that the American forces plan to adopt the IDF's tactic of a "swarm assault," such as was used by the Israeli army during its operations in Nablus in April 2002. The "swarm assault," according to Reuters, constituted the "unleashing" of "roving covert infantry squads whose movements were coordinated using air surveillance."

"The Americans are used to fighting either in force or with isolated commando teams, while the swarm tactic is a combination of both," an Israeli military source said, quoted by Reuters. "It is ideal for hitting terrorists concentrated in civilian populations."

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U.S. officials noted the similarity of their tactics in Iraq with those employed by the IDF, but denied that they are modeled on them, Reuters reported.

Israelis go to Iraq, U.S. officers come to Israel

The Guardian reported that Israeli security officials went to Iraq to advise American troops there. "Some Israelis went to Iraq as well, not to do training, but for providing consultations," an American intelligence source told the newspaper.

Brigadier-General Michael Vane, deputy chief of staff at the U.S. Army's training and doctrine command, mentioned the cooperation with Israel in a letter to *Army* magazine in July. "We recently traveled to Israel to glean lessons learned from their counter-terrorist operations in urban areas," he wrote.

Yediot Aharonot reported that the American military officials were in Israel for a few days and visited the IDF command center, focusing on ways to deal with Iraqi insurgency.

"They were interested in things in which we have a lot of experience," a senior Israeli security official told Yediot Aharonot. "They learned about explosive charges, and how to neutralize them, ... intelligence gathering, the use of dogs to locate charges. They were completely unfamiliar with the use of dogs, and this greatly interested them," the official said.

According to Reuters, the U.S. special forces have so far been slow in adopting one IDF tactic -- having commandos dressed as civilians swoop in to capture or kill fugitive insurgents. "In consultations, the Americans have made it clear that they see the need for undercover work to flush out wanted terrorists. But they lack personnel qualified in Arabic and the basic cultural knowledge needed to blend in," an Israeli military source said.

The Guardian reported that Israeli "consultants" were helping train U.S. special forces in ways to "neutralize" guerrilla leaders. "This is basically an assassination program. That is what is being conceptualized here. This is a hunter-killer team," a former senior U.S. intelligence official told the newspaper.

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[West Bank of the Tigris](#)

The Baltimore Sun, 10 December 2003

AMERICAN TACTICS against insurgents in Iraq are coming to resemble Israel's in its conflict with the Palestinians, and it's not hard to see why.

For one thing, cordoning off villages and blowing up houses and seizing relatives of suspected fighters may simply be the most obvious policy for a big army occupying uncertain or hostile territory. But for another, it turns out that the U.S. Army has actually been coached by Israeli officers, according to several published reports.

Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, the U.S. commander in Iraq, says that attacks by insurgents are likely to escalate through the winter and spring. The Pentagon has apparently decided to borrow a page from the Israelis and send in more Special Forces troops, essentially to target and kill leaders of enemy cells. The hope is that elite assassination squads will do a better job ferreting out their foes, while minimizing civilian casualties, than an armored division can do, even if they don't win any hearts and minds. It seems reasonable, because it actually comes closer to police work than to warfare, and that's what is needed.

There are just two problems: Identification with Israel is fatal to the American cause in Iraq and throughout the Middle East. To the extent that Iraqis see Hamas as fighting for them, and to the extent that fedayeen and jihadist fighters in Iraq see bombing an American convoy as a blow on behalf of the Palestinians, the whole U.S. enterprise is lost.

Second, it's difficult to argue that Israeli policies in the West Bank and Gaza Strip have been paying off. The intifada continues. Peace seems remote at best. And world opinion has turned strongly against Israel.

Surely, Pentagon planners recognize the risks inherent in their new course. The clear implication is that they have lost faith in the previous occupation policies.

It is worth noting that another major shift is going on: Finally, belatedly, the State Department has started sending virtually all available Arabic speakers to Iraq. They no longer need to get political (meaning neoconservative) clearance. The aim is to get Americans into the country who might actually be able to get a sense of what is going on there.

Neither of these is a small change, or a midcourse correction. They wouldn't have happened if the first seven months of the U.S. occupation of Iraq had been anything close to a success. It's commendable that the Bush administration is pragmatic enough to try something new, though the prospect of stoking an intifada from one end of Iraq to the other is unsettling.

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One course of action that looks as though it may be shaping up would be particularly disastrous: jamming a lid on Iraq sometime in the first half of 2004, so that the place appears to be subdued come Election Day in November. Short-term fixes like that have a way of leading to long-term and needlessly painful headaches. A migraine in Iraq would be no way to mark President Bush's second term.

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Army: No Israeli trainers at Bragg

by Kevin Maurer, *Fayetteville Observer*, 10 December 2003

U.S. Army Special Operations officials are denying a British newspaper report that Israeli advisers came to Fort Bragg to train special forces soldiers in counter-insurgency tactics including assassination.

The Guardian, a British newspaper, reported Tuesday that the Israeli Defense Force sent urban warfare specialists to Fort Bragg to train special forces soldiers to act as "hunter-killer" teams tasked with killing guerrilla leaders in Iraq and foreign fighters attempting to cross the Syrian border with Iraq.

The Guardian quoted two unnamed sources in its report. One confirmed that the Israeli advisers did the training at Fort Bragg.

"This command is not conducting any combined U.S. or Israeli training at Fort Bragg," Lt. Col. Hans Bush, a spokesman for U.S. Army Special Operations, said. The U.S. Army Special Operations Command is based at Fort Bragg.

It is unclear if the training occurred elsewhere. Calls to U.S. Special Operations Command, which oversees all U.S. special operations forces and U.S. Central Command, which is in charge of U.S. forces in Iraq, seeking comment about the reported training were not returned. Both commands are based at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, Fla.

Bush said working and training with foreign military soldiers "is a core task" of special operations units.

"Our training focuses on doctrinal approaches to special operations in general," he said.

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International flavor

Soldiers from other nations often come to Fort Bragg to train at the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare Center and School.

U.S. Special Forces units are trained in guerrilla warfare, and one of their primary missions is "foreign internal defense."

Foreign internal defense is the development of skills, tactics and techniques to counter a guerrilla movement against a standing government, he said.

Bush said assassination is not part of that training.

Special Forces units are also trained to perform combat search and rescue missions, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance and counter-drug operations.

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[Kurdish soldiers trained by Israelis](#)

BBC 19 Dec 2006

Newsnight has obtained the first pictures of Kurdish soldiers being trained by Israelis in Northern Iraq, as well as an interview with one of the former commandos who carried out the work.

When the former Israeli special forces soldiers were sent to Iraq in 2004 they were told they would be disowned if they were discovered.

Their role there was to train two groups of Kurdish troops.

One would act as a security force for the new Hawler International Airport (near Erbil) and the other, of more than 100 peshmerga or Kurdish fighters, would be trained for "special assignments", according to one of Newsnight's interviewees.

Contractors

An Israeli security consulting firm called Interop acted as the main contractor for the Hawler airport project and set up two subsidiaries (Kudo and Colosium) to carry out work in Iraq.

Kudo and Colosium described themselves as Swiss-registered companies.

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It's a bit tense because you know where you are and you know who you are, and there's always a chance that you'll get revealed
An Israeli trainer

In addition to the training, Kudo provided quad bikes, communications equipment and security fencing.

One of the founders of Interop, and its Chairman until 2003, was Danny Yatom, a former Head of Mossad - the Israeli foreign intelligence service and now an MP.

He told Newsnight today: "I was not aware of what was done in 2004 and 2005 because I cut all contacts with the company when I entered the Israeli parliament in 2003."

During 2004-5, Interop and Kudo were run by Shlomi Michaels, a former head of Israel's counter-terrorist unit. Contacted by Newsnight, Mr Michaels declined to comment.

Special assignments

Newsnight was told by the Israeli interviewee involved in the training that senior Kurdish officials were aware of their nationality, but not the troops being trained.

The sensitivities for the Kurdish authorities are serious, since their political enemies have long accused them of being in cahoots with Israel.

The Kurdish authorities have previously denied allowing any Israelis into northern Iraq.

The Israeli trainer says: "You know, day by day it's a bit tense because you know where you are and you know who you are. And there's always a chance that you'll get revealed."

"My part of the contract was to train the Kurdish security people for a big airport project and for training, as well as the Peshmerga, and the actual soldiers, the army.

"We were training them in all kinds of anti-terror lessons, anti-terror, security airport, training them with long rifles, pistols; telling them, teaching them tactics like shooting behind doors, behind barricades, shooting from the left, shooting from the right, shooting from windows, how to shoot first, how to identify a terrorist in a crowd.

"That's clearly special assignments. That's only training that special units get for special assignments.

"We crossed the border from Turkey and one of the intelligence officers passed us by, through the border, without stamping our passports.

"So you reckon that if two guys from the intelligence service knew we were Israelis and they saw our passports as well, the leadership knew as well - I mean their bosses, that's natural."

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"The second Israel"

Khaled Salih, a spokesman for the Kurdistan Regional Government, says: "These are not new allegations for us. Back in the sixties and seventies we were called 'the second Israel' in the region and we were supposed to be eliminated by Islamist nationalist and now Islamist groups.

"They look for internal enemies and we are the easiest to target. These kind of speculations have been around in the region for more than 30 years."

The Kurdistan region sits at a strategic crossroads. To the east is Iran, to the north-west Turkey. Both countries have significant Kurd minorities and are worried about a Kurdish state emerging in northern Iraq.

The authorities there have accepted that for now and that they must remain part of a federal Iraq.

As they develop their region, the Kurds have opened an international airport at Irbil (Hawler in Kurdish).

It now boasts dozens of international flights each week and it is at Hawler International that the Israelis began their work.

Strategic options

With Iran becoming Israel's principal enemy, there have been reports of Israelis using Kurdish areas of Iraq to increase its strategic options.

One constraint facing the Israelis, should they ever want to hit Iran, is distance. Most Israeli jets are short range and they have few in-flight tankers. Some studies have suggested that Israel could make refuelling stops at a modern airfield in Kurdistan.

If the Israelis ever planned to use Hawler airport as an emergency refuelling stop, it has now been compromised by Israeli press reports.

After finishing their training, Kurds sang their national anthem while marching behind one of the Israelis.

Israeli Government spokesman, Mark Regev, told Newsnight that the Investigations Division of the Israeli Ministry of Defence had passed the details of this case to the Israeli police to see if there had been any violation of export laws.

He added: "We have not authorised anyone to do any defence work in Iraq... If information is brought and there's clear evidence that people broke our law, of course I expect them to be prosecuted."

MARK URBAN'S REPORT WAS SHOWN ON NEWSNIGHT ON TUESDAY, 19 SEPTEMBER, 2006

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- [Iraq: Quicksand & Blood \(13 Nov 2003\)](#)

George W. Bush and his top advisers learned little from the Vietnam debacle of the 1960s, since most avoided service in the war. But many top Bush aides played key roles in the repression of leftist peasant uprisings in Central America in the 1980s, a set of lessons the Bush administration is now trying to apply to the violent resistance in Iraq.

The key counterinsurgency lesson from Central America was that the U.S. government can defeat guerrilla movements if it is willing to back a local power structure, no matter how repulsive, and if Washington is ready to tolerate gross human rights abuses. In Central America in the 1980s, those tactics included genocide against hundreds of Mayan villages in Guatemala's highlands and the torture, rape and murder of thousands of young political activists throughout the region. [More on this below]

The body dumps that have been unearthed across Central America are thus little different from the mass graves blamed on Saddam Hussein in Iraq, except in Central America they represented the dark side of U.S. foreign policy and received far less U.S. press scrutiny. Another lesson learned from the 1980s was the importance of shielding the American people from the ugly realities of a U.S.-backed "dirty war" by using P.R. techniques, which became known inside the Reagan administration as "perception management."

The temptation to recycle these counterinsurgency strategies from Central America to Iraq is explained by the number of Reagan-era officials now back in prominent roles in George W. Bush's administration.

They include Elliot Abrams, who served as assistant secretary of state for Latin America in the 1980s and is a National Security Council adviser to Bush on the Middle East; John Negroponte, U.S. ambassador to Honduras in the 1980s and now Bush's U.N. Ambassador; Paul Bremer a counter-terrorism specialist in the 1980s and Iraq's civilian administrator today; Bush's Secretary of State Colin Powell, who was the senior military adviser to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger in the 1980s; and Vice President Dick Cheney, who was a Republican foreign-policy stalwart in Congress two decades ago.

Proxy Army

One important difference between Iraq and Central America, however, is that to date, the Bush administration has had trouble finding, arming and unleashing an Iraqi proxy force that compares to the paramilitary killers who butchered suspected leftists in Central America. In El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, well-established "security forces" already existed. Plus, in Nicaragua,

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Ronald Reagan could turn to the remnants of ousted dictator Anastasio Somoza's National Guard to fashion a contra rebel force.

In Iraq, however, U.S. policymakers chose to disband – rather than redirect – Saddam Hussein's army and intelligence services, leaving the burden of counterinsurgency heavily on U.S. occupying troops who are unfamiliar with Iraq's language, history and terrain.

Now, with U.S. casualties mounting, the Bush administration is scrambling to build an Iraqi paramilitary force to serve under the U.S.-appointed Iraqi Governing Council's interior minister. The core of this force would be drawn from the security and intelligence wings of five political organizations, including Ahmad Chalabi's formerly exile-based Iraqi National Congress.

Bush's national security adviser Condoleezza Rice said on Nov. 10 that the administration's No. 1 strategy in Iraq is to build an Iraqi security force, which she claims already numbers about 118,000 people, roughly the size of the U.S. military contingent in Iraq. Many of these Iraqis have received speeded-up training with the goal of using them to pacify the so-called Sunni Triangle north of Baghdad.

Earlier, some U.S. officials, including civilian administrator Bremer, balked at a paramilitary force out of fear it would become a tool of repression. "The unit that the Governing Council wants to create would be the most powerful domestic security force in Iraq, fueling concern among some U.S. officials that it could be used for undemocratic purposes, such as stifling political dissent, as such forces do in other Arab nations," the Washington Post wrote.

But faced with the rising U.S. death toll, Bremer no longer has "any objection in principle" to this concept, a senior U.S. official told the Post. [Washington Post, Nov. 5, 2003] With all the missteps that have plagued the U.S. occupation, Bremer appears to understand that the Iraqi security situation needs to be bolstered – and quickly.

In much of the Sunni Triangle, U.S. control now is intermittent at best, existing only during heavily armed U.S. forays into resistance strongholds. "American troops patrol less frequently, townspeople openly threaten Iraqi security personnel who cooperate with U.S. forces, and the night belongs to the guerrillas," the Washington Post reported from Thuluiya about 60 miles north of Baghdad. [Nov. 8, 2003]

One U.S. senator who has visited the region told me that the struggle for Iraq may take 30 years before a new generation accepts the American presence. But even taking the long view does not guarantee success. Israel has been battling to break the back of Palestinian resistance for more than three decades with no sign that younger Palestinians are less hostile to the Israeli occupation. The Iraqi

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insurgency already has spread too far and penetrated too deeply to be easily uprooted, military experts say.

Central American Lessons

Having lurched into this Iraqi quicksand, the Bush administration is now searching for lessons that can be gleaned from the most recent U.S. counterinsurgency experience, the region-wide wars in Central America that began as uprisings against ruling oligarchies and their military henchmen but came to be viewed by the Reagan administration as an all-too-close front in the Cold War.

Though U.S.-backed armies and paramilitary forces eventually quelled the leftist peasant rebellions, the cost in blood was staggering. The death toll in El Salvador was estimated at about 70,000 people. In Guatemala, the number of dead reached about 200,000, including what a truth commission concluded was a genocide against the Mayan populations in Guatemala's highlands.

The muted press coverage that the U.S. news media has given these atrocities as they have come to light over the years also showed the residual strength of the "perception management" employed by the Reagan administration. For instance, even when the atrocities of former Guatemalan dictator Efraim Rios Montt are mentioned, as they were in the context of his defeat in Guatemala's Nov. 9 presidential elections, the history of Reagan's warm support for Rios Montt is rarely, if ever, noted by the U.S. press.

While the slaughter of the Mayans was underway in the 1980s, Reagan portrayed Gen. Rios Montt and the Guatemalan army as victims of disinformation spread by human rights groups and journalists. Reagan huffily discounted reports that Rios Montt's army was eradicating hundreds of Mayan villages.

On Dec. 4, 1982, after meeting with Rios Montt, Reagan hailed the general as "totally dedicated to democracy" and declared that Rios Montt's government had been "getting a bum rap." Reagan also reversed President Jimmy Carter's policy of embargoing military equipment to Guatemala over its human rights abuses. Carter's human rights embargoes represented one of the few times during the Cold War when Washington objected to the repression that pervaded Central American society.

Death Squad Origins

Though many U.S.-backed regimes in Latin America practiced the dark arts of "disappearances" and "death squads," the history of Guatemala's security operations is perhaps the best documented because the Clinton administration declassified scores of the secret U.S. documents in the late 1990s to assist a Guatemalan truth commission. The Guatemala experience also may be the most instructive today in illuminating a possible course of the counterinsurgency in Iraq.

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The original Guatemalan death squads took shape in the mid-1960s under anti-terrorist training provided by a U.S. public safety adviser named John Longon, the declassified documents show. In January 1966, Longon reported to his superiors about both overt and covert components of his anti-terrorist strategies.

On the covert side, Longon pressed for “a safe house [to] be immediately set up” for coordination of security intelligence. “A room was immediately prepared in the [Presidential] Palace for this purpose and ... Guatemalans were immediately designated to put this operation into effect,” according to Longon’s report. Longon’s operation within the presidential compound became the starting point for the infamous “Archivos” intelligence unit that evolved into a clearinghouse for Guatemala’s most notorious political assassinations.

Just two months after Longon's report, a secret CIA cable noted the clandestine execution of several Guatemalan "communists and terrorists" on the night of March 6, 1966. By the end of the year, the Guatemalan government was bold enough to request U.S. help in establishing special kidnapping squads, according to a cable from the U.S. Southern Command that was forwarded to Washington on Dec. 3, 1966.

By 1967, the Guatemalan counterinsurgency terror had gained a fierce momentum. On Oct. 23, 1967, the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research noted the "accumulating evidence that the [Guatemalan] counterinsurgency machine is out of control." The report noted that Guatemalan "counter-terror" units were carrying out abductions, bombings, torture and summary executions "of real and alleged communists."

The mounting death toll in Guatemala disturbed some American officials assigned to the country. The embassy's deputy chief of mission, Viron Vaky, expressed his concerns in a remarkably candid report that he submitted on March 29, 1968, after returning to Washington. Vaky framed his arguments in pragmatic terms, but his moral anguish broke through.

“The official squads are guilty of atrocities. Interrogations are brutal, torture is used and bodies are mutilated,” Vaky wrote. “In the minds of many in Latin America, and, tragically, especially in the sensitive, articulate youth, we are believed to have condoned these tactics, if not actually encouraged them. Therefore our image is being tarnished and the credibility of our claims to want a better and more just world are increasingly placed in doubt.”

Vaky also noted the deceptions within the U.S. government that resulted from its complicity in state-sponsored terror. “This leads to an aspect I personally find the most disturbing of all -- that we have not been honest with ourselves,” Vaky said. “We have condoned counter-terror; we may even in effect

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have encouraged or blessed it. We have been so obsessed with the fear of insurgency that we have rationalized away our qualms and uneasiness.

“This is not only because we have concluded we cannot do anything about it, for we never really tried. Rather we suspected that maybe it is a good tactic, and that as long as Communists are being killed it is alright. Murder, torture and mutilation are alright if our side is doing it and the victims are Communists. After all hasn't man been a savage from the beginning of time so let us not be too queasy about terror. I have literally heard these arguments from our people.”

Though kept secret from the American public for three decades, the Vaky memo obliterated any claim that Washington simply didn't know the reality in Guatemala. Still, with Vaky's memo squirreled away in State Department files, the killing went on. The repression was noted almost routinely in reports from the field.

On Jan. 12, 1971, the Defense Intelligence Agency reported that Guatemalan forces had "quietly eliminated" hundreds of "terrorists and bandits" in the countryside. On Feb. 4, 1974, a State Department cable reported resumption of "death squad" activities.

On Dec. 17, 1974, a DIA biography of one U.S.-trained Guatemalan officer gave an insight into how U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine had imbued the Guatemalan strategies. According to the biography, Lt. Col. Elias Osmundo Ramirez Cervantes, chief of security section for Guatemala's president, had trained at the U.S. Army School of Intelligence at Fort Holabird in Maryland. Back in Guatemala, Ramirez Cervantes was put in charge of plotting raids on suspected subversives as well as their interrogations.

The Reagan Bloodbath

As brutal as the Guatemalan security forces were in the 1960s and 1970s, the worst was yet to come. In the 1980s, the Guatemalan army escalated its slaughter of political dissidents and their suspected supporters to unprecedented levels.

Ronald Reagan's election in November 1980 set off celebrations in the well-to-do communities of Central America. After four years of Jimmy Carter's human rights nagging, the region's hard-liners were thrilled that they had someone in the White House who understood their problems.

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The oligarchs and the generals had good reason for optimism. For years, Reagan had been a staunch defender of right-wing regimes that engaged in bloody counterinsurgency against leftist enemies. In the late 1970s, when Carter's human rights coordinator, Pat Derian, criticized the Argentine military for its "dirty war" -- tens of thousands of "disappearances," tortures and murders -- then-political commentator Reagan joshed that she should "walk a mile in the moccasins" of the Argentine generals before criticizing them. [For details, see Martin Edwin Andersen's *Dossier Secreto*.]

After his election in 1980, Reagan pushed to overturn an arms embargo imposed on Guatemala by Carter. Yet as Reagan was moving to loosen up the military aid ban, the CIA and other U.S. intelligence agencies were confirming new Guatemalan government massacres.

In April 1981, a secret CIA cable described a massacre at Cocob, near Nebaj in the Ixil Indian territory. On April 17, 1981, government troops attacked the area believed to support leftist guerrillas, the cable said. According to a CIA source, "the social population appeared to fully support the guerrillas" and "the soldiers were forced to fire at anything that moved." The CIA cable added that "the Guatemalan authorities admitted that 'many civilians' were killed in Cocob, many of whom undoubtedly were non-combatants."

Despite the CIA account and other similar reports, Reagan permitted Guatemala's army to buy \$3.2 million in military trucks and jeeps in June 1981. To permit the sale, Reagan removed the vehicles from a list of military equipment that was covered by the human rights embargo.

No Regrets

Apparently confident of Reagan's sympathies, the Guatemalan government continued its political repression without apology.

According to a State Department cable on Oct. 5, 1981, Guatemalan leaders met with Reagan's roving ambassador, retired Gen. Vernon Walters, and left no doubt about their plans. Guatemala's military leader, Gen. Fernando Romeo Lucas Garcia, "made clear that his government will continue as before -- that the repression will continue."

Human rights groups saw the same picture. The Inter-American Human Rights Commission released a report on Oct. 15, 1981, blaming the Guatemalan government for "thousands of illegal executions." [Washington Post, Oct. 16, 1981]

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But the Reagan administration was set on whitewashing the ugly scene. A State Department "white paper," released in December 1981, blamed the violence on leftist "extremist groups" and their "terrorist methods," inspired and supported by Cuba's Fidel Castro. Yet, even as these rationalizations were pitched to the American people, U.S. intelligence agencies in Guatemala continued to learn of government-sponsored massacres.

One CIA report in February 1982 described an army sweep through the so-called Ixil Triangle in central El Quiche province. "The commanding officers of the units involved have been instructed to destroy all towns and villages which are cooperating with the Guerrilla Army of the Poor [known as the EGP] and eliminate all sources of resistance," the report stated. "Since the operation began, several villages have been burned to the ground, and a large number of guerrillas and collaborators have been killed."

The CIA report explained the army's modus operandi: "When an army patrol meets resistance and takes fire from a town or village, it is assumed that the entire town is hostile and it is subsequently destroyed." When the army encountered an empty village, it was "assumed to have been supporting the EGP, and it is destroyed. There are hundreds, possibly thousands of refugees in the hills with no homes to return to. ... The well-documented belief by the army that the entire Ixil Indian population is pro-EGP has created a situation in which the army can be expected to give no quarter to combatants and non-combatants alike."

Rios Montt

In March 1982, Gen. Rios Montt seized power in a coup d'état. An avowed fundamentalist Christian, he immediately impressed official Washington, where Reagan hailed Rios Montt as "a man of great personal integrity."

By July 1982, however, Rios Montt had begun a new scorched-earth campaign called his "rifles and beans" policy. The slogan meant that pacified Indians would get "beans," while all others could expect to be the target of army "rifles." In October, he secretly gave carte blanche to the feared "Archivos" intelligence unit to expand "death squad" operations.

The U.S. embassy was soon hearing more accounts of the army conducting Indian massacres. On Oct, 21, 1982, one cable described how three embassy officers tried to check out some of these reports but ran into bad weather and canceled the inspection. Still, the cable put a positive spin on the situation. Though unable to check out the massacre reports, the embassy officials did "reach the conclusion that the army is completely up front about allowing us to check alleged massacre sites and to speak with whomever we wish."

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The next day, the embassy fired off an analysis that the Guatemalan government was the victim of a communist-inspired "disinformation campaign," a claim embraced by Reagan with his "bum rap" comment after he met with Rios Montt in December 1982.

On Jan. 7, 1983, Reagan lifted the ban on military aid to Guatemala and authorized the sale of \$6 million in military hardware. Approval covered spare parts for UH-1H helicopters and A-37 aircraft used in counterinsurgency operations. State Department spokesman John Hughes said political violence in the cities had "declined dramatically" and that rural conditions had improved too.

In February 1983, however, a secret CIA cable noted a rise in "suspect right-wing violence" with kidnappings of students and teachers. Bodies of victims were appearing in ditches and gullies. CIA sources traced these political murders to Rios Montt's order to the "Archivos" in October to "apprehend, hold, interrogate and dispose of suspected guerrillas as they saw fit."

Sugarcoating

Despite these grisly facts on the ground, the annual State Department human rights survey sugarcoated the facts for the American public and praised the supposedly improved human rights situation in Guatemala. "The overall conduct of the armed forces had improved by late in the year" 1982, the report stated.

A different picture -- far closer to the secret information held by the U.S. government -- was coming from independent human rights investigators. On March 17, 1983, Americas Watch representatives condemned the Guatemalan army for human rights atrocities against the Indian population.

New York attorney Stephen L. Kass said these findings included proof that the government carried out "virtually indiscriminate murder of men, women and children of any farm regarded by the army as possibly supportive of guerrilla insurgents."

Rural women suspected of guerrilla sympathies were raped before execution, Kass said. Children were "thrown into burning homes. They are thrown in the air and speared with bayonets. We heard many, many stories of children being picked up by the ankles and swung against poles so their heads are destroyed." [AP, March 17, 1983]

Publicly, however, senior Reagan officials continued to put on a happy face. On June 12, 1983, special envoy Richard B. Stone praised "positive changes" in Rios Montt's government. But Rios Montt's vengeful Christian fundamentalism was hurtling out of control, even by Guatemalan standards. In August 1983, Gen. Oscar Mejia Victores seized power in another coup.

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Despite the power shift, Guatemalan security forces continued to kill those who were deemed subversives or terrorists. When three Guatemalans working for the U.S. Agency for International Development were slain in November 1983, U.S. Ambassador Frederic Chapin suspected that "Archivos" hit squads were sending a message to the United States to back off even the mild pressure for human rights improvements.

In late November, in a brief show of displeasure, the administration postponed the sale of \$2 million in helicopter spare parts. The next month, however, Reagan sent the spare parts. In 1984, Reagan succeeded, too, in pressuring Congress to approve \$300,000 in military training for the Guatemalan army.

By mid-1984, Chapin, who had grown bitter about the army's stubborn brutality, was gone, replaced by a far-right political appointee named Alberto Piedra, who was all for increased military assistance to Guatemala.

In January 1985, Americas Watch issued a report observing that Reagan's State Department "is apparently more concerned with improving Guatemala's image than in improving its human rights."

Death Camp

Other examples of Guatemala's "death squad" strategy came to light later. For example, a U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency cable in 1994 reported that the Guatemalan military had used an air base in Retalhuleu during the mid-1980s as a center for coordinating the counterinsurgency campaign in southwest Guatemala – and for torturing and burying prisoners.

At the base, pits were filled with water to hold captured suspects. "Reportedly there were cages over the pits and the water level was such that the individuals held within them were forced to hold on to the bars in order to keep their heads above water and avoid drowning," the DIA report stated.

The Guatemalan military used the Pacific Ocean as another dumping spot for political victims, according to the DIA report. Bodies of insurgents tortured to death and live prisoners marked for "disappearance" were loaded onto planes that flew out over the ocean where the soldiers would shove the victims into the water to drown, a tactic that had been a favorite disposal technique of the Argentine military in the 1970s.

The history of the Retalhuleu death camp was uncovered by accident in the early 1990s when a Guatemalan officer wanted to let soldiers cultivate their own vegetables on a corner of the base. But the officer was taken aside and told to drop the request "because the locations he had wanted to cultivate were burial sites that had been used by the D-2 [military intelligence] during the mid-

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eighties," the DIA report said. [To see the Guatemalan documents, go to the National Security Archive's [Web site](#).]

Guatemala, of course, was not the only Central American country where Reagan and his administration supported brutal counterinsurgency operations -- and then sought to cover up the bloody facts. Deception of the American public -- a strategy that the administration internally called "perception management" -- was as much a part of the Central American story as the Bush administration's lies and distortions about weapons of mass destruction were to the lead-up to the war in Iraq.

Reagan's falsification of the historical record became a hallmark of the conflicts in El Salvador and Nicaragua as well as Guatemala. In one case, Reagan personally lashed out at a human rights investigator named Reed Brody, a New York lawyer who had collected affidavits from more than 100 witnesses to atrocities carried out by the U.S.-supported contras in Nicaragua.

Angered by the revelations about his contra "freedom-fighters," Reagan denounced Brody in a speech on April 15, 1985, calling him "one of dictator [Daniel] Ortega's supporters, a sympathizer who has openly embraced Sandinismo."

Privately, Reagan had a far more accurate understanding of the true nature of the contras. At one point in the contra war, Reagan turned to CIA official Duane Clarridge and demanded that the contras be used to destroy some Soviet-supplied helicopters that had arrived in Nicaragua. In his memoirs, Clarridge recalled that "President Reagan pulled me aside and asked, 'Dewey, can't you get those vandals of yours to do this job.'" [See Clarridge's *A Spy for All Seasons*.]

'Perception Management'

To manage U.S. perceptions of the wars in Central America, Reagan also authorized a systematic program of distorting information and intimidating American journalists. Called "public diplomacy," the project was run by a CIA propaganda veteran, Walter Raymond Jr., who was assigned to the National Security Council staff. The project's key operatives developed propaganda "themes," selected "hot buttons" to excite the American people, cultivated pliable journalists who would cooperate and bullied reporters who wouldn't go along.

The best-known attacks were directed against *New York Times* correspondent Raymond Bonner for disclosing Salvadoran army massacres of civilians, including the slaughter of some 800 men, women and children in El Mozote in December 1981. But Bonner was not alone. Reagan's operatives pressured scores of reporters and their editors in an ultimately successful campaign to minimize information about these human rights crimes reaching the American people. [For details, see Robert Parry's *Lost History*.]

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The tamed reporters, in turn, gave the administration a far freer hand to pursue counterinsurgency operations in Central America. Despite the tens of thousands of civilian deaths and now-corroborated accounts of massacres and genocide, not a single senior military officer in Central America was held accountable for the bloodshed.

The U.S. officials who sponsored and encouraged these war crimes not only escaped legal judgment, but remain highly respected figures in Washington. Some have returned to senior government posts under George W. Bush. Meanwhile, Reagan has been honored as few recent presidents have with major public facilities named after him, including National Airport in Washington.

On Feb. 25, 1999, a Guatemalan truth commission issued a report on the staggering human rights crimes that Reagan and his administration had aided, abetted and concealed.

The Historical Clarification Commission, an independent human rights body, estimated that the Guatemalan conflict claimed the lives of some 200,000 people with the most savage bloodletting occurring in the 1980s. Based on a review of about 20 percent of the dead, the panel blamed the army for 93 percent of the killings and leftist guerrillas for three percent. Four percent were listed as unresolved.

The report documented that in the 1980s, the army committed 626 massacres against Mayan villages. "The massacres that eliminated entire Mayan villages ... are neither perfidious allegations nor figments of the imagination, but an authentic chapter in Guatemala's history," the commission concluded.

The army "completely exterminated Mayan communities, destroyed their livestock and crops," the report said. In the northern highlands, the report termed the slaughter a "genocide." Besides carrying out murder and "disappearances," the army routinely engaged in torture and rape. "The rape of women, during torture or before being murdered, was a common practice" by the military and paramilitary forces, the report found.

The report added that the "government of the United States, through various agencies including the CIA, provided direct and indirect support for some [of these] state operations." The report concluded that the U.S. government also gave money and training to a Guatemalan military that committed "acts of genocide" against the Mayans.

"Believing that the ends justified everything, the military and the state security forces blindly pursued the anticommunist struggle, without respect for any legal principles or the most elemental ethical and

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religious values, and in this way, completely lost any semblance of human morals," said the commission chairman, Christian Tomuschat, a German jurist.

"Within the framework of the counterinsurgency operations carried out between 1981 and 1983, in certain regions of the country agents of the Guatemalan state committed acts of genocide against groups of the Mayan people," Tomuschat said. [For more details on the commission's report, see the Washington Post or New York Times, Feb. 26, 1999]

During a visit to Central America, on March 10, 1999, President Clinton apologized for the past U.S. support of right-wing regimes in Guatemala. "For the United States, it is important that I state clearly that support for military forces and intelligence units which engaged in violence and widespread repression was wrong, and the United States must not repeat that mistake," Clinton said.

Iraqi War

Less than five years later, however, the U.S. government is teetering on the edge of another brutal counterinsurgency war in Iraq.

Some supporters of Bush's invasion of Iraq in March are now advocating an iron fist to quell the growing Iraqi resistance. In a debate in Berkeley, Calif., for instance, ardent Bush supporter Christopher Hitchens declared that the U.S. intervention in Iraq needed to be "more thoroughgoing, more thought-out and more, if necessary, ruthless." [See Salon.com, Nov. 11, 2003]

Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, the U.S. commander in Iraq, told a news conference in Baghdad on Nov. 11 that U.S. forces would follow a new get-tough strategy against the Iraqi resistance. "We are taking the fight into the safe havens of the enemy, in the heartland of the country," Sanchez said.

But U.S. military commanders in Iraq and Bush enthusiasts at home are not alone in encouraging a fierce counterinsurgency campaign to throttle the Iraqi resistance. Though many war critics say the likelihood of a difficult occupation should have been anticipated before the invasion, some now agree that the U.S. government must fight and win in Iraq or the United States will suffer a crippling loss of credibility in the Middle East and throughout the world.

Wishing for a result, however, can be far different from achieving a result. Wanting the U.S. forces to prevail and asserting that they must prevail does not mean that they will prevail. American troops could find themselves trapped in a long painful conflict against a determined enemy fighting on its home terrain.

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As the United States wades deeper into this Iraqi quicksand, the lessons of the bloody counterinsurgency wars in Central America will be tempting to the veterans of the Reagan administration. Those lessons certainly are the most immediate antecedents to many of the architects of the Iraq counterinsurgency.

But the Central American lessons may have limited applicability to Iraq. For one, the Bush administration can't turn to well-entrenched power centers with ideologically committed security forces as the Reagan administration could in Guatemala and other Central American countries. Also, the cultural divide and the physical distance between Iraq and the United States are far greater than those between Central America and the United States.

So even if the Bush administration can hastily set up an Iraqi security apparatus, it may not be as committed to a joint cause with the Americans as the Central American paramilitary forces were with the Reagan administration. Without a reliable proxy force, the responsibility for conducting a scorched-earth campaign in Iraq likely would fall to American soldiers who themselves might question the wisdom and the morality of such an undertaking.

Perhaps one of the lessons of the current dilemma is that George W. Bush may have dug such a deep hole for U.S. policy in Iraq that even Guatemalan-style brutality applied to the Sunni Triangle would only deepen the well of anti-Americanism that already exists in many parts of Iraq and across much of the Islamic world.

In the 1980s, as a correspondent for the Associated Press and Newsweek, Robert Parry broke many of the stories now known as the Iran-Contra Affair. His latest book is Lost History.

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- [Moving Targets \(Seymour Hersh 16 Dec 2003\)](#)
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- [The Way of the Commandos \(Peter Maass 01 May 2005\)](#)
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B - Other Resources (p 70– p 154)

[Iraq: End Interior Ministry Death Squads \(29 Oct 2006\)](#)

[Government Death Squads Ravaging Baghdad \(23 Oct 2006\)](#)

[Govt Death Squads Ravaging Baghdad \(Dahr Jamail 20 Oct 2006\)](#)

[US-Trained, Supervised Police Slaughtering Iraqi Civilians \(05 Oct 2006\)](#)

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C - British Bombers in Basra (p 155 – p 167)

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[Iraq's death squads make the rules](#) (11 March 2006)

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[Death Squads in Iraq: A Timeline](#) (23 March 2006)

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[Saddam's pilots hunted down by death squads](#) (08 April 2006)

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