

The Counter-insurgency War in Iraq

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Website: www.cryingwolf.deconstructingiraq.org.uk



Death-squad style massacres

For Iraq, "The Salvador Option" Becomes Reality

Max Fuller, 2 June 2005

<http://globalresearch.ca/articles/FUL506A.html>

Abstract

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.

Mounting evidence indicates that the 'Salvador Option' mooted for Iraq is already proceeding at full throttle

On 8 January this year, Newsweek published an article that claimed the US government was considering a 'Salvador Option' to combat the insurgency in Iraq (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6802629/site/newsweek/>). The Salvador Option is a reference to the military assistance programme of the 1980s, initiated under Jimmy Carter and subsequently pursued by the Reagan administration, in which the US trained and materially supported the Salvadoran military in its counter-insurgency campaign against popularly supported FMLN guerrillas. The Newsweek article was widely cited in the mainstream media but the allegations were rapidly dismissed by Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld. Though the reports mentioned human-rights violations, they generally made little of the fact that it was the very units that US military advisors had instructed that were frequently responsible for the most unspeakable crimes* and that there was at times a clear correlation between fresh bouts of training and subsequent atrocities (see Noam Chomsky, 'The Crucifixion of El Salvador', <http://www.zmag.org/chomsky/sam/sam-2-02.html>).

In an earlier interview on 10 January, retired General Wayne Downing, former head of all US special operations forces, took a very different line, stating that US-backed special units had been 'conducting strikes' against leaders of the so-called insurgency since March 2003 (cited in 'Phoenix Rising in Iraq' by Stephen Shalom, <http://www.zmag.org/content/showarticle.cfm?ItemID=7227>). However, Downing was careful to say that implementing a Salvadoran strategy would add an extra 'type' of unit to the occupation's arsenal. What neither the press, Donald Rumsfeld, nor General Downing pointed

out was that the Salvador Option was already well underway in Iraq, and far more literally than might have been imagined.

According to an article recently 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 ('The Way of the Commandos', Peter Maass, http://psychoanalystsopposewar.org/resources_files/TheWay_of_the_Commandos.html).

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 the case of the 4th Brigade, such tactics ensured that a 20-man force was able to account for 60% of the total casualties inflicted by the unit (Manwaring, *El Salvador at War*, 1988, p 306-8). 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, op cit.)

The Police Commandos are in large part the brainchild of another US counter-insurgency veteran, Steven Casteel, a former top DEA man who has been acting as the senior advisor in the Ministry of the Interior. Casteel 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 (<http://cocaine.org/colombia/pablo-escobar.html> ; <http://www.ciponline.org/colombia/040105isac.htm>).

Like Colombia's death squads, Iraq's Police Commandos deliberately cultivate a frightening paramilitary image. During raids they wear balaclavas and black leather gloves and openly intimidate and brutalize suspects, even in the presence of foreign journalists (see the report by Peter Maass's). Significantly, many of the Commandos, including their leader, are Sunni Muslims.

Evidence of Massacres

In the last few weeks, with the discovery of several mass graves in and around Baghdad, evidence of multiple extra-judicial killings has started to become much more visible, but, in fact, even a cursory review of such archives as the one compiled by Iraq Body Count (<http://www.iraqbodycount.net/>) reveals that mass executions have been taking place commonly in Iraq over at least the last six months. What is particularly striking is that many of those killings have taken place since the Police Commandos became operationally active and often correspond with areas where they have been deployed.

The clearest correlation is in Mosul, where the Police Commandos began operating in late October (http://www.strykernews.com/archives/2004/10/29/special_iraqi_police_commandos_continue_operations.html). In mid-November it was reported that insurgents were conducting an offensive and had managed to drive most of the (regular) police from the city. There followed what was described as a joint counter-offensive by US forces and Police Commandos. The Police Commandos conducted raids inside the old quarter starting on 16 November in which dozens of suspects were arrested. During one such raid on a mosque and a tea shop, detainees, blindfolded and with their hands tied behind their backs, were seen being taken away by commandos (<http://www.smh.com.au/news/After-Saddam/Iraqi-soldiers-found-murdered-in-Mosul/2004/11/21/1100972263000.html>). In the weeks and months that followed over 150 bodies appeared (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/4105009.stm), often in batches and frequently having obviously been executed, usually with a bullet to the head (eg. <http://www.middle-east-online.com/english/iraq/?id=12147>).

The victims are repeatedly stated to have belonged mostly to the security forces, with ‘insurgents’ blamed for conducting a campaign of intimidation. Yet, most of the bodies were dressed in civilian clothes with little in the way of identification. In the few instances in which positive identifications have been reported, these are based on flimsy evidence. For instance, in the case of nine victims described as soldiers that had been shot in the head, a US army lieutenant simply stated that a ‘unit recently moved to one of the US bases’ had ‘some guys missing’ (<http://www.smh.com.au/news/After-Saddam/Iraqi-soldiers-found-murdered-in-Mosul/2004/11/21/1100972263000.html>); photographs of the victims showed them wearing civilian clothes. A blatant case of disinformation regards a group of 31 bodies ‘discovered’ by the Police Commandos in March 2005 scattered around a cemetery in western Mosul. The bodies, described by an Interior Ministry spokesman as belonging to civilians, police officers and army soldiers, were said to have been the victims of a single policeman, Shoqayer Fareed Sheet, who confessed to these and numerous other killings on a special television show conceived by founder of the Police Commandos Adnan Thavit, called Terrorism in the Hands of Justice (<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A23448-2005Mar10.html>). Not only does this programme break every conceivable moral and legal standard, but it is notorious for parading obviously tortured detainees who are often forced to confess to being homosexuals or paedophiles as well as murderers. (

<http://66.102.9.104/search?q=cache:OkQOb9q9QbkJ:uniraq.org/documents/ArabicRegionalNews22March2005.doc+quds+press&hl=en&client=safari>)

Given the extreme paucity of evidence, the lack of secure identification and the disinformation put out by the Interior Ministry, there is at least a strong possibility that many, if not all, of the extra-judicial killings in Mosul have been carried out by the Police Commandos.

Police Commandos Directly Accused

A similar, though less complete pattern is emerging in other areas where the Commandos have been operating, notably Samarra, where bodies were recently found in nearby Lake Tharthar (<http://www.turkishpress.com/news.asp?id=41936>). However, the strongest case is currently starting to emerge in Baghdad, where a wave of killings over the last few weeks has resulted in accusations being made directly against the state security forces and specifically against the Police Commandos. The accusations revolve around three distinct massacres. On 5 May a shallow mass grave was discovered in the Kasra-Wa-Atash industrial area containing 14 bodies. The victims, all young men, had been blindfolded, their hands tied behind their backs and they had been executed with shots to the head. The bodies also revealed such torture marks as broken skulls, burning, beatings and right eyeballs removed. In this case family members were able to identify the bodies; the victims were Sunni farmers on their way to market. According to Phil Shiner of the British-based Public Interest Lawyers, the men had been arrested when Iraqi security forces raided the vegetable market (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/international/story/0,,1488096,00.html>, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/wireStory?id=760368>).

Less than two weeks later on 15 May, 15 more bodies were discovered at two sites in western Baghdad. Eight of the victims were found in the Al-Shaab area, while a further seven were discovered behind a mosque in Ore district (<http://www.kuna.net.kw/home/Story.aspx?Language=en&DSNO=733276>). According to the Chicago Tribune, 'some had been blindfolded, most were found with their hands bound and all had been shot in the head' (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0505170030may17.0.3795261.story?coll=chi-newsopinionperspective-utl>). The Association of Muslim Scholars quickly responded to the wave of killings, accusing soldiers and Interior Ministry commandos of having 'arrested imams and the guardians of some mosques, tortured and killed them, then got rid of their bodies in a garbage dump in the Shaab district' (http://www.mg.co.za/articlePage.aspx?articleid=238784&area=/breaking_news/breaking_news__international_news/). 'This is state terrorism by the Ministry of Interior' said Hareth al-Dhari, secretary general of the Association (<http://news.ft.com/cms/s/47613c82-c804-11d9-9765-00000e2511c8.html>). Whilst al-Dhari also blamed the Badr brigades associated with the ruling Shia coalition, the emphasis of his denunciation was quickly shifted in the mainstream press to reinforce only this aspect of the accusation and the notion of sectarian tit-for-tat violence (eg http://newswww.bbc.net.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4569103.stm). The Iraqi government's riposte to the Association's accusations was predictably insidious, with the new defence minister blaming

terrorists wearing military uniforms (<http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/nationworld/chi-0505170030may17.0.3795261.story?coll=chi-newsopinionperspective-utl>). However, it should come as little surprise to discover that at the beginning of May the government had announced an imminent counter-insurgency crackdown, which they said was likely to unleash well-trained commandos in Baghdad and other trouble spots (<http://www.informationclearinghouse.info/article8725.htm>).

Wider Evidence of Massacres

With such accusations being made specifically against US-trained counter-insurgency forces it is worth briefly mentioning some of the other massacres that have occurred in Iraq over recent months. In October 2004 some 49 bodies were discovered on a remote road about 50km south of Baquba. The victims, who wore civilian clothes, had all been shot in the head. The Interior Ministry announced that they were off-duty soldiers. Some accounts by police said the rebels were dressed in Iraqi military uniforms, although details were far from clear (<http://sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/news/archive/2004/10/24/international0921EDT0440.DTL> ; <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,136419,00.html>).

Similarly, in March of this year 26 bodies were discovered at Rumana, near Qaim, close to the Syrian border. According to the Interior Ministry, most of the victims were members of a rapid response team. The victims had been blindfolded, handcuffed and shot in the head. The bodies, which once again were dressed in civilian clothes, were found in an area where the US army had been conducting Operation River Blitz, a marine-led assault on insurgents in the Euphrates River valley (<http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,136419,00.html> ; <http://edition.cnn.com/2005/WORLD/meast/03/09/iraq.main/>).

To further muddy the waters, the bodies of eight men from Sadr City were found in Yussufiah, 40km south of Baghdad, on 9 May this year. The victims, who had been tortured, then executed with a bullet to the back of the neck, were found wearing army uniforms, but relatives identified them as civilians. Army captain Ahmed Hussein suggested that the killers wanted people to believe they had executed soldiers (http://www.news24.com/News24/World/Iraq/0,,2-10-1460_1701988,00.html).

There are other similar cases of mass killings, as well as many more involving smaller numbers of bodies far too numerous to mention. Nonetheless, it is worth emphasising the many bodies (more than 100) gradually being dredged up from the River Tigris, especially around Suwayra, south of Baghdad. The bodies began to be noticed in late February of this year, surfacing at the rate of one or two a day, but began to increase in frequency in April; some of the victims, who were mostly men but included some women and children, were bound, others shot or beheaded. In April, president Talabani claimed the victims had been kidnapped by insurgents in the village of Madain, but, in fact, those identified to date hailed from a wide radius and could not be accounted for by a single episode of kidnapping. Police in Suwayra have stated that many of the victims are likely to have been stopped at impromptu checkpoints by masked men, while some Sunnis say that the victims may include people detained by

the police (<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2005/04/22/MNG45CDDBQ1.DTL>).

In light of these bodies in the Tigris, it may be significant to note a strange report on the website Jihad Unspun of US soldiers dumping body bags from helicopters in the Diali River in eastern Iraq during the early hours of the morning. The writer argues that the bags held the corpses of American soldiers or foreign mercenaries that the army wished to conceal from public knowledge (http://www.jihadunspun.com/intheatre_internal.php?article=100552&list=/home.php&). This implausible theory leaves a very large question mark over the identity of bodies that the US army wishes to conceal and recalls the report submitted to the Brussels Tribunal, 'Tarmiya: the Silent Agony'. This account contains first hand testimony from an agricultural worker who survived an attempted execution by a team of US special forces. He and a colleague were abducted from the farm where they worked, then taken to a secluded grove where their throats were cut. They were left for dead, but miraculously, one of them survived (<http://www.brusselstribunal.org/>). Whilst this account lacks corroboration and has remained anonymous to protect the identities of those involved, it remains a convincing description of the kind of long-range 'reconnaissance' missions that people like James Steele were conducting in Vietnam.

Modelling the Iraq War

Whilst much of the violence across Iraq appears chaotic, some lines are starting to emerge that follow the pattern and the logic of other counter-insurgency wars. In El Salvador, when the war finally came to an end, it became clear that the majority of its victims had been participants in progressive social movements as well as peasants who had been perceived as sympathising with or supporting the guerrillas. The object of the war was not to defeat an ideologically motivated rebellion, it was to prevent the possibility of progressive social change and to maintain the country within the US economic orbit in its traditional tributary role.

The same can be said of Colombia at present, where the long current phase of the internal conflict in which thousands of social activists have been murdered has butted seamlessly with the country's exposure to economic liberalisation. In short, legitimate social demands are violently suppressed in favour of allowing foreign capital to extract super profits from Colombia's rich natural resources and selling off its public assets for the same purpose. Much of the conflict takes place within the realm of so-called 'civil society', where progressive leaders are excluded or eliminated, whilst those who are prepared to throw in their lot with predatory foreign capital are rewarded and extolled.

In Iraq the war comes in two phases. The first phase is complete: the destruction of the existing state, which did not comply with the interests of British and American capital. The second phase consists of building a new state tied to those interests and smashing every dissenting sector of society. Openly, this involves applying the same sort of economic shock therapy that has done so much damage in swathes of the Third World and Eastern Europe. Covertly, it means intimidating, kidnapping and murdering opposition voices.

The economic assault on Iraq is well underway. Visible unemployment stands at around the catastrophic level of 28%, large parts of the state sector have already been sold off and wages have fallen (often to less than half of their pre-war levels), thanks in part to the introduction of thousands of cheap workers from Pakistan, India and the Philippines. These workers are often tricked into coming and stripped of their passports, effectively working as slaves in order to undercut accustomed Iraqi living standards. Reconstruction projects are given almost exclusively to foreign (mainly US) companies, who pay a flat rate of 15% tax with no limits to repatriation of profits, while Iraq's state-owned companies are excluded (<http://www.antiwar.com/orig/shumway.php?articleid=3005>). In the countryside, Iraqi farmers are now obliged to buy a licence to grow genetically modified seed and are prohibited from resowing the seed developed by their ancestors in the cradle of civilisation (<http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/KHA501A.html>).

The covert assault has also begun. Attacks on workers and trade unionists are becoming increasingly common (<http://www.iraqitradeunions.org/archives/000200.html>) and it is instructive that the railway workers union, in an industry that has been slated for privatisation, seems to have been particularly targeted, with US administrators on the ground threatening to bring in Indian workers (<http://www.iraqitradeunions.org/archives/000117.html>). Whilst the IFTU, the dominant, state-sanctioned new trade-union umbrella organisation, may have endorsed the occupation, the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq (FWCUI) has not; in any case, ordinary Iraqi workers will find themselves increasingly at odds with the puppet government as they try to defend even rudimentary living standards. Industrial action is already widespread in Iraq, though little reported in the mainstream press.

An even more frightening picture is emerging within the sector of higher education, where, since the beginning of the occupation, some 200 Iraqi academics have been murdered, while control and intimidation has become systematic. Many of the victims worked in the social sciences, where overlap with progressive social movements is unavoidable (<http://www.newstatesman.com/200409060018>).

Unfortunately, in Iraq it is almost impossible to securely attribute any of the host of assassinations and extra-judicial killings, while the US-UK propaganda campaign has left many all too willing to believe in such bugbears as Al-Zarqawi (see Michel Chossudovsky's article 'Who is Abu Musab Al-Zarqawi?' (<http://www.globalresearch.ca/articles/CHO405B.html>)). What we do know, however, is that hundreds of Iraqis are being murdered and that paramilitary hit squads of the proxy government organized by US trainers with a fulsome pedigree in state terrorism are increasingly being associated with them.

In the context of a country where good information is extremely scarce, disinformation and black propaganda are endemic and independent journalists and monitors are deliberately eliminated, it is vital to be able to model the situation in order to understand it and, hopefully, be effective. There are two principle dimensions to such modelling. In the first, Iraq has frequently been compared to Vietnam. The similarity is that the US has well over 100,000 soldiers on the ground. However, the

analogy is misleading in that in Iraq conflict with a populous enemy state, as North Vietnam was, ended quickly. As a model, El Salvador is not wholly accurate either. In El Salvador US 'advisors' were few in number and prohibited from taking part in combat. Nevertheless, it is towards this model that the US is attempting to move, hoping to farm out the sordid business of occupation to Iraqi auxiliaries. But, in many ways it is contemporary Colombia that offers the closest analogy: not for the disposition of US forces, but because here the same process of asset-stripping, impoverishment and conquistador-like plundering is both deeply entrenched and ongoing. It is here that is to be found that clearest pattern for the assaults on academics, independent trade unionists and peasant organisations that will increasingly characterise Iraq for those prepared to look beyond the fireworks. This is the second dimension that any model must address, but in essence the pattern is repeated time after time in every imperialist so-called counter-insurgency war; for behind each and every one lurks the reality of exploitation and class war, and, as successive imperialist powers have shown, the bottom line in combating the hopes and dreams of ordinary people is to resort to spreading terror through the application of extreme violence. In Iraq, the Salvador Option may mean returning home to find your entire family seated at table with their own severed heads served to them and a bowl of blood for relish.

*One of the worst atrocities was committed in December 1981 at the village of El Mozote in the department of Morazán by the Atlacatl Battalion, an elite counter-insurgency force trained by US advisors and regarded as one of El Salvador's best fighting units. Over 200 men, women and children (the entire village) were systematically tortured and murdered over the course of a day (http://www.usip.org/library/tc/doc/reports/el_salvador/tc_es_03151993_casesC.html).

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Crying Wolf: Media Disinformation and Death Squads in Occupied Iraq

by Max Fuller

Global Research, November 10, 2005

Abstract

The phenomenon of death squads operating in Iraq has become generally accepted over recent months. However, in its treatment of the issue, the mainstream media has zealously followed a line of attributing extrajudicial killings to unaccountable Shia militias who have risen to prominence with the electoral victory of Ibramhim Jafaari's Shia-led government in January. The following article examines both the way in which the information has been widely presented and whether that presentation has any actual basis in fact. Concluding that the attribution to Shia militias is unsustainable, the article considers who the intellectual authors of these crimes against humanity are and what purpose they serve in the context of the ongoing occupation of the country.

Shortly before dawn on 14 September 2005, just hours before a huge bomb exploded in Baghdad killing 88 labourers, around 50 men in army uniforms arrived at the village of Taji 16km north of Baghdad in military vehicles, bearing military identification. After searching the village, they seized 17 local men, described by one witness as vegetable sellers, ice sellers and taxi drivers. Handcuffed and blindfolded, the men were led from their homes before being shot in the head in the main square (Newsday, Al Jazeera, Juan Cole).

Such killings represent a pattern of violence as frightening as and perhaps more systematic than the steady wave of bombings targeting civilians in occupied Iraq. Whilst the pattern of death-squad-style executions is broadly recognised, it remains badly understood and, in its representation, deeply distorted.

The appearance of death squads was first highlighted in May this year, when over a 10-day period dozens of bodies were found casually disposed of in rubbish dumps and vacant areas around Baghdad. All of the victims had been handcuffed, blindfolded and shot in the head and many of them also showed signs of having been brutally tortured. On 5 May 15 bodies were discovered in an industrial area called Kasra-Wa-Atash and subsequently identified as belonging to a group of farmers seized from a Baghdad market. The bodies revealed such torture marks as broken skulls, burning, beatings and right eyeballs removed. Witnesses claimed the men had been arrested by members of the security forces (BBC, Guardian). Less than two weeks later, 15 more bodies were found at two sites (KUNA). According to the chairman of the Sunni Waqf court, Adnan Muhammad Salman, the victims were Sunnis who had been arrested at their homes or at mosques (ArabicNews.com).

The evidence was sufficiently compelling for the Association of Muslim Scholars (AMS), a leading Sunni organisation, to issue public statements in which they accused the security forces attached to the Ministry of the Interior as well as the Badr Brigade, the former armed wing of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI), of being behind the killings. They also accused the Ministry of the Interior of conducting state terrorism (Financial Times).

Since then, a steady stream of the victims of extrajudicial killings has flowed through the Baghdad morgue. Characteristically, the victims' hands are tied or handcuffed behind their backs and they have been blindfolded. In most cases they also appear to have been whipped with a cord, subjected to electric shocks or beaten with a blunt object and shot to death, often with single bullets to the head. Yasser Salihee, a journalist for Knight Ridder investigating the bodies, wrote that eyewitnesses claimed many of the victims were seized by men wearing commando uniforms in white Toyota Land Cruisers with police markings. (Knight Ridder). Salihee's last article was published on 27 June, three days after he was fatally shot by a US sniper at a routine checkpoint.

It is impossible to know exactly how many people are being killed in this way. Salihee reported that more than 30 examples occurred in less than a week, while Faik Baqr, director of Baghdad's central morgue, states that before the occupation of Iraq, the morgue handled 200 to 250 suspicious deaths a month, of which perhaps 16 had firearm injuries. Now the figure is between 700 and 800, with some 500 firearm wounds (op. cit.). The Independent's Robert Fisk adds that there are so many bodies that human remains are stacked on top of each other and unidentified bodies are rapidly disposed of (Robert Fisk).

The killings have not been confined to Baghdad. For example, on 24 June six farmers were taken from the village of Hashmiyat 15km west of Baquba by men in army uniform; their decapitated bodies were found soon afterwards a mile from their homes (Associated Press). More recently, on 8 September, 18 people were abducted from the town of Iskandriyah 40km south of the capital by men in National Guard Uniforms and executed in isolated open land (Xinhuanet). These few examples represent the tip of a rapidly expanding iceberg, with the majority of extrajudicial-style killings seriously under-investigated and underreported.

In response to the accusations of police involvement, drawing on eyewitness accounts, Iraq's new Ministry of the Interior claims that it is easy to get hold of police uniforms and that the killings are the work of 'insurgents' masquerading as security forces in order to create sectarian divisions (BBC). Such denials are echoed by US special advisor to the ministry Steven Casteel, who has stated that, 'The small numbers that we've investigated we've found to be either rumor or innuendo' (Salihee, op. cit.).

Despite such denials, few journalists have been able to dismiss what the Observer's foreign editor Peter Beaumont describes as the 'extraordinary sense of impunity with which these abductions and killings take place' as mere innuendo (Observer), or the consistent eye-witness accounts of the kidnappers

appearing with expensive foreign equipment issued to the security forces, such as the Toyota Land Cruisers and the Glock 9mm pistols, as simply rumour (Salihee, *op. cit.*). The Interior Ministry's explanation of large, heavily armed groups of resistance fighters moving freely about the capital becomes even less plausible when one considers that many of the killings took place following the onset of Operation Lightning/Thunder in late May. This divisional-size operation saw the deployment of 40,000 Iraqi troops, who sealed Baghdad and installed 675 checkpoints around the city (Associated Press). Hundreds of arrests followed as the security forces began to 'hunt down insurgents' (BBC). According to the AMS, in one instance, on 13 July, dozens of Interior Ministry commandos stormed several houses in northern Baghdad and detained 13 people, before torturing and killing them in a nearby apartment (Gulf Daily News).

However, instead of placing the blame squarely on the apparatus of the new Iraqi state, the mainstream media has almost exclusively chosen to shift the emphasis away, resorting to a number of standardised literary devices. The first device is to frame extrajudicial killings in the context of a wider panoply of supposed retaliatory sectarian violence. For example, Francis Curta of the Associated French Press writes that 'A series of tit-for-tat killings has raised sectarian tension to boiling points' (eg. Mail&Guardian Online), Mohamad Bazzi writing for Newsday refers to a 'wave of retaliatory killings' (Newsday), and James Hider of the London Times believes that 'the only certainty is that once [the bodies] are identified, someone will want revenge' (Times Online). The second device is to state or imply that the security forces are closely associated with largely unaccountable Shia militias, especially the Badr Brigade. For instance, Patrick Cockburn of the UK Independent writes that 'Some carrying out the attacks appear to belong to the 12,000-strong paramilitary police commandos', while, in almost the same breath he adds that 'Fear of Shia death squads, perhaps secretly controlled by the Badr Brigade, the leading Shia militia, frightens the Sunni' (Independent); in a similar vein, the BBC claims that 'Angry mourners at a funeral for some of those killed said they had died at the hands of police and Shia militiamen' (BBC).

Most importantly, reports variously stress that the government, Interior Ministry and police are under sectarian Shia control. Hence, Samir Haddad, a correspondent for Islam Online, refers to the 'dominant-Shiite newly-formed security forces' (Islam Online), the Chicago Tribune's Liz Sly states that Sunnis 'accused Iraq's security forces, now controlled by the Shiite-led government' (Chicago Tribune), Tom Lasseter, writing for the Inquirer, claims that 'Badr members have gained unprecedented authority' and that the Interior Minister, who controls the nation's police and commando forces, is a former Supreme Council official with close ties to Badr' (Philadelphia Inquirer), the Observer's Beaumont writes that 'Accountability has also become more opaque since the formation of the Shia-dominated government' (*op. cit.*), the BBC's Richard Galpin states that the 'Sunni community in particular claims it is being targeted by the Shia-dominated police force' (BBC), Anthony Loyd for the London Times talks of 'allegations of extensive extra-judicial killings of Sunnis by the Shia-dominated Iraqi security forces' (Times Online) and Sinan Salaheddin of the Associated Press, states 'The grisly finds have led Sunnis to believe that Shiite Muslims who dominate the

government and the Interior Ministry are waging a quiet, deadly campaign against them' (eg. Seattle Post-Intelligencer).

Other devices include mentioning the Interior Ministry's claims of insurgents donning police or commando uniforms or implying that if the security forces are involved in torture and murder it is a reflection of the fact that it is composed of reconstituted members of the former state who know only a culture of violence and intimidation; this is clearly at odds with those reports that regard the security forces as entirely Shia dominated. Wilder devices talk about security forces' frustration or blame Zarqawi for attempting to inflame sectarian tensions. Whilst all of these devices are employed in various combinations, notably absent from every account is any serious examination of the new Iraqi state or, assiduously avoided, the role of the occupying powers, leaving the most thoughtful of journalist to wonder with Beaumont whether the Iraqi state is 'stumbling towards a policy of institutionalised torture' or whether human-rights abuses are conducted by 'rogue elements' within the security apparatus (Salihee's investigation represents the one exception, with the emphasis placed firmly on the organs of the state, supported by solid primary evidence).

Police Commandos and Disinformation Brigades

An instructive starting point for an examination of the prevailing media consensus is to consider some of the forces of the Iraqi state most closely associated with allegations of serious human rights abuses.

The majority of accusations are general. Journalists refer to the police, security forces, the National Guard or to poorly identified police commandos, but specific accusations have been made against a unit known as the Wolf Brigade. The identification of the Wolf Brigade with cases of abduction, torture and execution in Baghdad was first made on 16 May, when Mothana Harith Al-Dari, a spokesman for the AMS, stated that 'The mass killings and the crackdown and detention campaigns in north-eastern Baghdad over the past two days by members of the Iraqi police or by an Interior Ministry special force, known as the Wolf Brigade, are part of a state terror policy', in relation to the discoveries of the victims of extrajudicial executions noted above (Islam Online).

Within days a Knight Ridder journalist, Hannah Allam, had published under a variety of titles an article about the Wolf Brigade, highlighting their maverick tough-guy image and presenting their leader, who goes by the nom de guerre of Abul Waleed, as a devout Shiite, 'complete with a photo of Imam Ali and religious chants programmed into his constantly ringing cell phone.' (Knight Ridder). Allam informed readers that Waleed regarded the AMS as infidels and tossed their accusations of torture and murder into the bin. Additionally, readers learned that the unit was formed as the brainchild of Waleed in October 2004, saw its first action in Mosul after nearly two months' training with US forces, and is behind the inhuman television programme Terrorists in the Grip of Justice, in which tortured detainees are forced to confess to a lurid array of crimes (Associated Press). However, whilst belittling charges of horrendous human-rights violations as 'the usual complaints', Allam made no reference to the Wolf Brigade being a special forces unit attached to the Interior Ministry.

On 9 June rightwing US think tank the Council for Foreign Relations published a paper devoted to Iraqi militias (CFR), simultaneously repeated in the New York Times. In a series of FAQ-type entries, the report reiterated many of Allam's insights about the Wolf Brigade, as well as offering some additional tidbits:

What is the Wolf Brigade?

The most feared and effective commando unit in Iraq, experts say. Formed last October by a former three-star Shiite general and SCIRI member who goes by the nom de guerre Abu Walid, the Wolf Brigade is composed of roughly 2,000 fighters, mostly young, poor Shiites from Sadr City.

However, the paper went further in emphasising the units' sectarian Shiite character, stating that 'One of Badr's recent offshoots is a feared, elite commando unit linked to the Iraqi Interior Ministry called the Wolf Brigade', and spelling out the distinction between it and other, Sunni militia-style units.

Are there any Sunni-led commando units?

Yes. At least one counterinsurgency unit is headed by a former officer of Saddam Hussein's Baath Party. The Special Police Commandos, like the Wolf Brigade, have a reputation for brutality, but the group is also considered one of Iraq's most effective and well-disciplined counterinsurgency units.

Those familiar with Peter Maas's article 'The Way of the Commandos', published by The New York Times Magazine just six weeks earlier, will recognise that, in fact, the Wolf Brigade bears a striking similarity to the unit he identifies as the Special Police Commandos. The Police Commandos, too, were formed in autumn 2004 and saw one of their first major commitments in Mosul in November; like the Wolf Brigade, their leader also founded an unspeakably vile television show called *Terrorism in the Grip of Justice*.

But there are fundamental distinctions between these units as well. The Police Commandos were founded on the initiative of then Interior Minister Falah al-Naqib, the son of a former Iraqi Chief of Staff, believed by many to have been a major CIA asset (National Review Online), under the command of his uncle, an ex-Baathist, Sunni military intelligence officer and CIA coup-plotter called Adnan Thabit. Its recruits are drawn from former members of the special forces and Republican Guard, with mixed ethnic and religious background (Washington Post), while its chain of command is said to be largely Sunni. Most importantly, the Police Commandos were formed under the experienced tutelage and oversight of veteran US counterinsurgency fighters, and from the outset conducted joint-force operations with elite and highly secretive US special-forces units (Reuters, National Review Online).

A key figure in the development of the Special Police Commandos was James Steele, a former US Army special forces operative who cut his teeth in Vietnam before moving on to direct the US military mission in El Salvador at the height of that country's civil war. Steele was responsible for selecting and training the small units (or death squads) who were boasted to have inflicted 60% of the casualties

caused in that 'counterinsurgency' campaign (Manwaring, *El Salvador at War*, 1988, p 306-8).

Principally, the tens of thousands of victims were civilians.

Another US contributor was the same Steven Casteel who as the most senior US advisor within the Interior Ministry brushed off serious and well-substantiated accusations of appalling human right violations as 'rumor and innuendo'. Like Steele, Casteel gained considerable experience in Latin America, in his case participating in the hunt for the cocaine baron Pablo Escobar in Colombia's Drugs Wars of the 1990s, as well as working alongside local forces in Peru and Bolivia (Maas op. cit.). Whilst Casteel's background is said to be Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), the operation against Escobar was a joint intelligence effort, involving the CIA, DEA, Delta Force and a top-secret military intelligence surveillance unit known as Centra Spike (Marihemp, SpecWarNet). The operation had no impact on Colombia's position as the world's major source of cocaine (which, incidentally or not, owed much to the CIA, who had become heavily involved in the trade as part of their secret funding of Nicaragua's Contra mercenary army; for a detailed account, read the series *Dark Alliance*, originally published by the San Jose Mercury News), with the centre of gravity ultimately shifting to dozens of micro cartels (Houston Chronicle). However, the operation did lead to the formation of a death squad known as Los Pepes, which was to form the nucleus for Colombia's present paramilitary death-squad umbrella organisation, the AUC, responsible for over 80 percent of the country's most serious human-rights abuses (Colombia Journal). Whilst no official connection was ever admitted, Los Pepes relied on the intelligence data held in the fifth-floor steel vault at the US Embassy in Bogota that served as the operation's nerve centre. Lists of the death squad's victims rapidly came to mirror those of Escobar's associates collated at the embassy headquarters (Cocaine.org, Cannabis News).

Casteel's background is significant because this kind of intelligence-gathering support role and the production of death lists are characteristic of US involvement in counterinsurgency programs and constitute the underlying thread in what can appear to be random, disjointed killing sprees. Probably the best-attested example of such an operation is Indonesia during the early years of the Suharto dictatorship, when CIA officers provided the names of thousands of people, many of them members of the Indonesian Communist Party, to the army, who dutifully slaughtered them (Kathy Kadane). Similar cases can be made for the CIA supplying death lists and/or overseeing operations in Vietnam (OC Weekly), Guatemala, where death lists are known to have been compiled but were supposedly never acted upon (The Consortium), and El Salvador, where former killers have come forward to describe sharing desk space with US advisors who collected the 'intelligence' from 'heavy interrogation' but were spared details of the subsequent murders (Covert Action Quarterly). For an extensive list of countries in which the CIA has supported death squads, see the database compiled by Ralph McGehee (Serendipity).

Such centrally planned genocides are entirely consistent with what is taking place in Iraq today under the auspices of crackdowns like Operation Lightning, which make use of so-called Rapid Intrusion Brigades to make widespread, well orchestrated arrests (Financial Times). It is also consistent with what little we know about the Special Police Commandos, which was tailored to provide the Interior Ministry with a special-forces strike capability (US Department of Defense). In keeping with such a

role, the Police Commando headquarters has become the hub of a nationwide command, control, communications, computer and intelligence operations centre, courtesy of the US (Defend America). Interestingly, supplying a state-of-the-art communications network to coordinate mass murder was part of the plan in Indonesia as well (Pilger, *The New Rulers of the World*, p 30); it is doubtless common practice.

Finally, we know that by 30 January of this year, the Police Commandos had six functioning brigades and in early April the Al-Nimr (Tiger) Brigade took over from the Al-Dhib (Wolf) Brigade in Mosul (UNAMI). Interestingly, one of the Police Commandos' first Brigade commanders was a Shiite, apparently called Rashid al-Halafi, but Maas noted that 'he was regarded warily by other Shiites because he held senior intelligence posts under Saddam Hussein'.

Untangling the Web

Clearly, the Wolf Brigade, though commonly treated in media reports as an autonomous entity, is actually one component of the Interior Ministry's Special Police Commandos. Abu Walid, identified occasionally as Brig. Gen. Mohammed Qureishi, is the brigade commander, under overall command of Adnan Thabit. Another figure linked with both the Wolf Brigade and Police Commandos is Major General Rashid Flayyih, variously identified as commander of the brigade or the whole formation. If he can be identified with the brigade commander Rashid al-Halafi identified by Maas, it can be surmised that he has either been promoted or is another incarnation of Abu Walid.

Incredibly, I have not been able to find a single report written since accusations started to be made about the Wolf Brigade's involvement in the Baghdad killings that makes their identification with the Police Commandos clear, with journalists content to loosely refer to the unit as police commandos, as though there might be all sorts of police commando units. Though this might at first seem pedantic, the lack of clarity becomes even more incredible in the case of the 10 bricklayers suffocated in the back of a police van on 10 July (San Diego Union Tribune). To my knowledge, this remains the only case in which members of the security forces have been securely identified, with a survivor who had feigned death able to provide first-hand testimony. The unit responsible was the Wolf Brigade, but this information must be deduced from a reference in one article to the victims being taken to a police station at al Nisour Square (Knight Ridder) and Beaumont's mention that the Wolf Brigade is accused of running an interrogation centre as its Nissor Square headquarters (op. cit.). It seems that a nebulous Wolf Brigade linked to Badr, full of vengeful Shiite militiamen serves as a useful foil for allegations of 'state terrorism', but that when the accusations are sufficiently well-grounded, it is easier to keep it out of the spotlight for fear that a pattern of gross and systematic violations of human rights might start to emerge. The significance of this lies far beyond merely being able to expose sloppy journalistic practices, but actually reveals key characteristics of both the US imperial war machine and of the nature of their current occupation of Iraq.

With the finger of responsibility increasingly and inevitably pointing at well-organised counterinsurgency units operating from the Interior Ministry, one line of defence remains before intellectual authorship must be placed at the hands of the occupying powers. Since the election of 30 January and the transfer of office from the interim government of Ayad Allawi to the transitional one of Ibrahim Jafari in May, the mainstream media has unanimously chorused that power has fallen into the hands of Iraq's Shia majority. Most specifically, it is repeatedly claimed that the Interior Ministry and its security forces have come under the control of SCIRI and even that the Badr Brigades now wield considerable power within the ministry, with the new Interior Minister, Bayan Jaboor, described as a former Badr member. The manifestation of this control lies in the policy of de-Baathification, a process that was halted under the interim government of Ayad Allawi, but that was considered fundamental by the incoming government. The policy was actively opposed by the US administration, which feared that experienced personnel (for which, read Washington's favourites) might be lost, especially within the security forces and intelligence apparatus (Washington Post).

According to Firas al-Nakib, a legal advisor at the Interior Ministry and a Sunni, 160 senior members of the Interior Ministry staff were rapidly dismissed and many police commanders were replaced with Shiites loyal to the Shiite bloc that won the elections (Knight Ridder). Yet, after speaking with Jaboor, General Flayyih was reported to be reassured, with the former Badr member not only promising to support the Police Commandos (Financial Times), but calling for their rapid and more extensive deployment (Los Angeles Times). Flayyih's continuing tenure is particularly noteworthy, as, though a Shiite himself, Flayyih was in charge of the suppression of the Shia uprising in Nasiriya following the first Gulf War, and is, as such, a frontrunner in any serious Shia-led policy of de-Baathification. Like Flayyih, Adnan Thabit has retained a senior position, commanding all of the Interior Ministry's special forces (Multi-National Force - Iraq).

The issue of de-Baathification was recently addressed by Jaboor, who explained that the discharge of personnel was handled by a general inspector and that recruitment was not influenced by sect (Al Mendhar). Backing up his statements, he pointed out that many senior security posts within the ministry were held by Sunnis, including that of deputy minister for intelligence affairs (also leader of the Interior Ministry's spy service), currently held by General Hussain Kamal.

In fact, the entire intelligence establishment is a creation of the Anglo-American secret services (Los Angeles Times), which began building at least as early as the beginning of the occupation (Detroit Free Press), although it may be suspected that the process was conceived long before. The new Iraqi establishment was staffed by long-term CIA assets, such as General Mohammad Shahwani, who had been nurtured by the CIA since the late 1980s (Asia Times Online) and became director of the new National Intelligence Service (the Mukhabarat). Like Thabit and Flayyih, other old CIA hands, Shahwani had participated in attempted coups against the government of Iraq. Further agents (presumably existing intelligence assets for the most part) were recruited from Iraq's main political groups, consisting of SCIRI, the Dawa Party, the two main Kurdish parties, the Iraqi National Congress and the Iraqi National Accord. These agents became the Collection, Management and

Analysis Directorate (CMAD), whose principal job was to ‘turn raw intelligence into targets that could be used in operations’ (Detroit Free Press, op. cit.). Initially, ‘operations’ were carried out by a paramilitary unit composed of militia from the five main parties, who, under the supervision of US commanders, worked with US special forces to track down ‘insurgents’ (Washington Post). As the new Iraqi state apparatus developed, CMAD was split between the ministries of Defence and Interior, with an ‘elite corps’ creamed off to form the National Intelligence Service (Detroit Free Press, op. cit.). To oversee all three bodies, the National Intelligence Coordination Committee was established, headed, as National Security Advisor (appointed in April 2004), by Mowaffak Rubaie. This ‘leading Shiite moderate’ had been a spokesman for the Dawa Party in the 1980s when it was a serious terrorist organisation targeting Iraq, before moving on to help coordinate the Iraqi opposition from London (Asia Times Online, op. cit.). In London he worked with the Khoei Foundation, a pro-US charitable organisation that has distributed money for the CIA and is linked with the National Endowment for Democracy through Prime minister Jaafari’s advisor Laith Kuba, another long-term CIA asset (Village Voice).

These new intelligence agencies supply the data for the Interior Ministry to make arrests. A graphic and harrowing account of such arrests on 27 June 2004 was provided by UPI’s P. Mitchell Prothero, in what he describes as the ‘welcome arrival of frontier-style law enforcement’. Prothero described how local residents ‘seemed shocked’ as their doors were broken in and ‘men were dragged from their homes dishevelled and screaming’ by members of a SWAT team in central Baghdad. The raid had been planned for months by General Kamal’s intelligence agency within the Interior Ministry and the names of more than 100 detainees were checked against prepared lists (Washington Times). Prothero witnessed many of those detainees ‘worked over’ with metal batons and lengths of hose in the backs of vans, but the most serious abuse came later, within the Interior Ministry compound. On 29 June members of the Oregon National Guard swept into the grounds of the Interior Ministry and disarmed plain-clothed Iraqi policemen whom they had observed beating bound and blindfolded prisoners (Oregonian). The US soldiers began to administer first aid to the prisoners, who had also been starved of food and water for three days; many were clearly in a very serious condition. Steven Casteel was called to help deal with the situation (Boston Globe). After hours of negotiations, the soldiers unwillingly withdrew, leaving the victims in the hands of their torturers. Perhaps their ultimate fate will never be known, but as Casteel commented, ‘There’s always a pendulum between freedom and security’.

Like Thabit and Flayyih, Shahwani has retained his position under the transitional government and continues to report directly to the CIA (Seattle Times). Clearly, however, the purpose of stating or implying that unaccountable militias are behind the extrajudicial executions and/or that sectarian rivalries, especially Shia control of the Interior Ministry (which, as Beaumont correctly points out, is the centre of the horror), are to blame, is to distance the US from the almost unthinkable ongoing crimes against humanity. Comparable disinformation strategies have been employed in every counterinsurgency conflict with which the US has been involved; it is known as establishing ‘plausible deniability’. For example, in Colombia, where the US has been deeply involved for decades, paramilitary

death squads are invariably described in the media as a third force in the armed conflict, despite the fact that their victims are typically civilian opponents of the government, their members are drawn directly from serving members of the armed forces and they are only able to operate with the active complicity of the army (Human Rights Watch: The "Sixth Division"). In reality, they function as part of a shadow state, which exists to implement policies that must remain unaccountable.

More specifically, in the case of Iraq, this disinformation strategy not only seems to be designed to mask the real intellectual authors of genocidal crimes, but also, increasingly, appears to be directed towards creating the very sectarian divisions that it hides behind.

Towards Balkanisation

In every country where US-backed counter insurgency operations have taken place with their attendant massacres and death squads, the conflict has existed as one dimension in a strategy of neo-colonisation. In Indonesia the communists were exterminated as part of the corporate takeover of the economy, setting the stage for the globalisation of Asia (Pilger, *op. cit.* p 15-44); in Colombia today, brutal death-squad massacres and the assassination of popular leaders exist to safeguard and extend the investments of foreign multinationals in oil and mining as well as as part of an ongoing process of privatisation.

In this respect, Iraq is no different. Over and above the desire to control Iraq's massive oil reserves, the country is being subjected to enforced neo-liberal shock therapy, with wages slashed and the extensive state sector rapidly offered up for sale. Corresponding with this, is a catastrophic level of unemployment and the abandonment of service provision for the majority of the population, in short a return to typical Third World conditions (The New Standard). Such a process of economic devastation is not only unpopular, it is intolerable and there can be no doubt that most people in Iraq will oppose cuts and sell-offs and demand a restoration of employment and services. This is not a sectarian issue. To the extent to which opposition becomes effective, the leaders and activists of the movement are likely to become military targets for the state death squads, whatever guise they take.

It is hard to know exactly who the victims of the present wave of assassinations are. Certainly they have included some trade union leaders (Iraqi Federation of Workers' Trade Unions), while in the period up to March 2004 more than 1000 leading professionals and intellectuals had already been killed and thousands more had fled the country (Al Jazeera). Many of these people would have been members of the Baath party and their murders are very likely to be part of the policy of de-Baathification, which, insofar as it exists, has not targeted CIA collaborators, but will undoubtedly have included those seen as potential opponents of the new state. In passing, it is worth noting that while thousands of former teachers have been sacked, thousands more are being recruited from outside Iraq (Al Mendhar), presumably because they are either cheaper to employ (denied by the Iraqi government) or because they are more malleable to the new educational regime, which works closely with the World Bank and provides lucrative contracts to the Washington-based Creative Associates Inc

(Education News). Iraq's 30,000 new teachers have received just five days' training and must teach religion and a history that portrays Iraq's occupiers as saviours, rather than the former 'anti-Western propaganda' that might have served Iraqis better. Other victims of the death squads may be communists, the commentator Juan Cole noting that the Communist Party is so alarmed by the course of events that it is considering going underground; though he does not spell out the events that would force the party into hiding, they are not difficult to surmise (Juan Cole).

A further possibility, however, in addition to defeating a popularly backed resistance, is that the monstrous intelligence nexus created by the US in Iraq is orchestrating a strategy of ethnic cleansing as part of an effort to partition a country that might otherwise remain a regional pretender. Most of the military assaults have resulted in substantial civilian displacement (eg Washington Times), but, more worryingly, reports of families uprooting as the result of perceived sectarian violence are starting to become common. For example, in July, Mariam Fam of the Associated Press reported dozens of Shiites abandoned their homes in a poor farming community on the edge of Baghdad after receiving threats from Sunni militants that appeared in the form of typewritten flyers scattered on streets and doorsteps; prior to the Anglo-American invasion these people had shared their poverty, labour, food and intermarried with their Sunni neighbours (North Country Times). Similarly, Hala Jaber writing for the Sunday Times describes how Sunni families have fled Baghdad's majority-Shiite Iskan neighbourhood after the killings of 22 young Sunni men, taken away by men in police uniform who arrived in vehicles bearing police markings (Times Online). A similar situation is described in Baghdad's Ghalaliya district, where a spate of seemingly motiveless murders accelerated sharply over the summer, leaving more than 30 people, Sunnis and Shiites, dead (Los Angeles Times). The report claims that minority families there and elsewhere are selling their homes and moving to areas where they are in the majority. A similar picture is starting to emerge from other parts of the country. Jaber notes that thousands of Shiites have fled the predominantly Sunni towns of Ramadi, Falluja and Latafiya, while, according to Juan Cole, Sunnis are leaving Iraq's deep south and Arabs, presumably of both denominations, are being forced from the Kurdish district of Kirkuk (Juan Cole).

While many in the mainstream media and Iraq's puppet government have argued that insurgents linked to Abu Musab Zarqawi and al-Qaida are behind much of the violence, deliberately hoping to inflame sectarian divisions and incite a civil war (eg. News Day), it is interesting to note how closely their dangerous schemes correspond with the avowed aims of one of the most powerful figures in present-day Iraq. Mowaffak Rubaie, the US-installed national security advisor, promotes a vision that he calls 'democratic regionalism', by which Iraq would be dismembered into a loose federal system of four to six distinct provinces, with at least two Shiite provinces to the south and Baghdad as a separate district as well as the seat of federal government, nominally responsible for national defence (Newsweek). Coincidentally, such a plan is well catered for by Iraq's new constitution (NPR), but would amount to the disintegration of the Iraqi state. A de facto civil war would undoubtedly advance this process.

The parallels with the break up of Yugoslavia are obvious. Ed Joseph of the highly establishment Woodrow Wilson International Centre for Scholars notes that ‘the likelihood of civil war increases if, after attacks targeting a community, other members of the minority population flee’, in turn persecuting minorities in the area to which they fled (Los Angeles Times, op. cit.). However, where he sees the situation in Iraq as comparable to Bosnia, in many ways the pattern is closer to that of Kosovo, where widespread ethnic cleansing against Serbs took place under the noses of NATO observers after the withdrawal of Yugoslav forces (World Socialist Website).

In view of mounting evidence of Anglo-American involvement in the bombing campaigns targeting Iraqi civilians, notably the brief arrest of two British SAS men found with a car packed with explosives (William Bowles), it is worth speculating a little on the implementation of their wider strategy. Discounting Al-Qaida and Zarqawi in Iraq as fabrications designed for easy media consumption (Centre for Research on Globalisation), we are left with a situation in which someone is targeting Shias, mainly through the planting of bombs around mosques and at religious ceremonies, and someone is targeting Sunnis, mainly through extrajudicial executions carried out by parties that look a lot like the police but have become linked with the Shiite Badr Brigade in the popular imagination. It is impossible that the Iraqi resistance could account for this pandemic of fratricidal violence, whatever Adnan Thabit might say about insurgents in police uniforms. It is equally impossible that SCIRI and the Badr Brigade could account for much of it in a milieu dominated by CIA assets and US military forces. What is possible is that both sides of the apparent sectarian violence are run as part of a huge CIA-lead intelligence operation designed to split Iraq at the seams. I tentatively suggest that the intelligence apparatus at the Interior Ministry is contriving attacks on Sunnis and that British and US special forces in conjunction with the intelligence apparatus at the Iraqi Defence Ministry are fabricating insurgent bombings of Shias. Overseeing the entire operation is the ‘cream’ of CMAD under the direction of top-level US intelligence asset Mowaffak Rubaie, a man already experienced at participating in bombing campaigns, undoubtedly working hand in glove with the CIA and the National Security Council in the US.

False Flags, Semiotics and Vulgar Marxists

The French theorist Jean Baudrillard famously once stated that the first Gulf War did not take place. By this he did not mean that nothing happened, but that its presentation in the media consisted of an overwhelming barrage of the signs of War, which bore essentially no relationship to the annihilation of a Third World army by the most advanced military power in history. In short it was a simulation of war. This was perhaps the most extreme example of what Baudrillard referred to as the ‘ecstasy of communication’, that in our Information Age, concepts spin at such a rate that their outlines become lost and their original meanings are replaced with empty alternatives.

Fifteen years later, the same charges can be levelled against the recent Iraq ‘War’ and the country’s subsequent occupation. Most importantly, I believe that a process akin to that Baudrillard highlighted is being actively employed to simulate a civil war in Iraq. False-flag intelligence operations are aimed

at sowing seeds of a sectarian strife that was largely non-existent prior to the invasion. Thus, even many Sunni Iraqis are coming to believe that the well-organised death squads run from the CIA-controlled intelligence hub are actually the Badr Brigade they often claim to be; and thus British SAS men in Arab disguise plant bombs at Shia religious festivals to be blamed on fanatical Wahabi Sunni 'insurgents'.

Whether such tactics succeed in provoking further, autonomous acts of violence directed against the civilian population is much less significant than the impact they are able to exert within the media. This Anglo-American intelligence operation acts as a factory churning out the signs of Civil War: a 'wave of tit-for-tat sectarian violence' and the consequent ethnic cleansing. The signs are produced to be picked up by the media and spun and spun until nothing is left but a nebulous Civil War with no internal logic or structure, with the occupying forces as powerless to intervene as they were in the Balkans while Iraq splits into Rubia's desired four to six autonomous provinces. Those few journalists, like Yasser Salihee and Steven Vincent, who break the mould and start to investigate the actual authorship of extrajudicial killings themselves become victims.

When one former CIA operative candidly claimed that 'Intelligence services are the heart and soul of a new country' (Washington Post), they were inadvertently expressing a position that Noam Chomsky might call 'vulgar Marxist'. What they were actually confessing is that the essence of a state is the organisation of violence as the ultimate coercive measure and that the intelligence apparatus functions as its brain. Little wonder then that the US is so closely involved with intelligence services the world over, or that both coup d'états and savage repressions of sectors of the population deemed opposed to US interests have emanated from the offices of these same services.

To penetrate the media smokescreen of spontaneous, uncontrollable violence and understand the role of intelligence operations in the creation of a beholden, occupied client state or series of statelets is fundamental to understanding the processes in Iraq today. It is also fundamental to recognising that the presence of Anglo-American forces in Iraq does not merely exacerbate the present violence; in Iraq we are the violence.

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Who is controlling the death squads in Iraq?

10 December 2005

Members of the interior ministry police, who have been accused of involvement in death squads, being trained by US forces

The media blames the violence in occupied Iraq on sectarianism, but the role of the US and Britain in training the new security forces is rarely analysed, writes Max Fuller

It has become impossible for anyone with half an eye on Iraq over the last six months not to recognise the widespread presence of death squads, especially in Baghdad and the ring of towns surrounding it.

Typically, the victims of the death squads are found casually discarded — their eyes may be blindfolded, their hands are bound or handcuffed behind the back and they have been killed with shots to the head or chest.

The victims frequently bear the signs of horrific torture, including savage beatings, electrocution, cigarette and acid burns, gouged out eyes and even the use of electric drills.

In every case where evidence is available, the victims were arrested by uniformed members of the police or armed forces, or un-uniformed gunmen bearing interior ministry identification.

Such killings are not mere blips on the screen, but are considered to have reached epidemic proportions by human rights groups in Baghdad, who regard them and the associated disappearances as the most pressing problem in Iraq today.

One Baghdad mosque has documented the death or disappearance of around 700 Sunni Muslim civilians during the last four months.

In July the Iraqi journalist Yasser Salihee described hundreds of victims of extrajudicial killings passing through the Baghdad morgue.

Although his picture of the morgue is confirmed by other journalists, he remains the only one to have seriously investigated the allegations of involvement by the security forces.

His last article was published on 27 June, three days after his own assassination at the hands of a US army sniper at a routine checkpoint.

The most prominent allegations have come from Sunni groups, as the majority of victims seem to have been young Sunni men.

In May, the Association of Muslim Scholars accused the government of conducting a policy of state terror.

It pointed to what it believed to be the presence of members of the Badr Brigade, the armed wing of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, operating alongside interior ministry commandos.

The Iraqi government has responded by alleging that extrajudicial killings are the work of insurgents masquerading as police officers.

This leaves gaping questions hanging over how “insurgents” were able to obtain uniforms and expensive police equipment, as well as how they are able to operate freely in heavily curfewed areas.

The mainstream Western media, however, is not so easily outfoxed. They have seized on the allegations of Badr involvement and repeated the charge of sectarianism like a mantra. The pattern is consistent.

After every fresh revelation of torture or murder linked to Iraq’s new interior ministry, the media trots out much the same story.

It refers to uncontrollable militias, Badr infiltration of the security forces and Shia domination of the interior ministry.

It inevitably concludes that the incident in question is yet another example of the sectarian violence gripping Iraq.

Unspeakable

The pattern is visible in the most recent flurry of journalistic concern following the discovery on 13 November of an underground torture chamber in Baghdad, where around 170 prisoners were kept in unspeakable conditions.

Rumours that some of them had already been tortured to death remain unconfirmed.

The Observer’s Peter Beaumont writes that the roots of the human rights catastrophe that has enveloped the ministry are to be found in the simmering sectarian conflict of tit-for-tat assassinations.

The Independent’s Kim Sengupta states that the Badr militia controls part of the ministry.

No evidence is offered to support the contention that Badr controls the interior ministry, except perhaps the mention that the present minister is himself a former Badr member.

Almost no mention is made of the US and Britain’s role in training the security forces beside the

occasional “obviously knew nothing about it” comment.

No frame of reference of other US-backed counter insurgency campaigns is ever offered.

What the mainstream Western media neglects to remind us is that following the occupation of Iraq, British and US intelligence went into overdrive to establish a new Iraqi intelligence apparatus.

They rightly saw this as the linchpin of their puppet state. Recruits were drawn from existing intelligence agents (presumably CIA assets) within the main political parties, all of whom had returned to Iraq on the back of US tanks, and hammered into a new organisation known as the Collection, Management and Analysis Directorate (CMAD).

CMAD’s first task was to draw up lists of opponents, who were to be the targets of a paramilitary unit drawn from the militias of the same political parties, working in collusion with US special forces.

Who these targets were is not known. It is known, however, that in the first year of occupation some 1,000 Iraqi professionals, including many teachers, were murdered, promoting a mass exodus.

While some reporters suggested that disgruntled students might be responsible for the massacre of academics, the pattern is better placed within the total levelling of Iraq’s cultural and political life — an apocalyptic Year Zero.

This has, as journalist Felicity Arbuthnot describes in her article, Iraq’s Year Zero, (www.globalresearch.ca/articles/arb504a.html), witnessed the destruction of written records, historical treasures, public monuments and, it seems, even people.

US experienced in fighting dirty wars

Far from being Shia fundamentalists, Iraq’s new spy chiefs were former Baathists and long-term CIA assets like general Mohammad Shahwani, who became the director of the National Intelligence Service when CMAD was split in June 2004.

The US has been busy rebuilding the Iraqi interior ministry. The ministry was headed, until the notional transfer of power, by US Drug Enforcement Agency man Steven Casteel.

Casteel’s experience was gained in Latin America, where he was involved in several of the drug wars that served as cover for the CIA in the 1980s and 1990s.

He was involved in the hunt for Colombia’s cocaine baron Pablo Escobar.

This was an enormous covert intelligence operation that saw the creation of the Los Pepes death squad, which was to serve as the backbone for the country’s present paramilitary organisation.

Alongside Casteel, came James Steele, who, as senior counsellor to US ambassador Paul Bremer for Iraqi security forces, was to systematise the establishment of paramilitary special forces units within the new interior ministry.

Steele's background runs from Vietnam and Cambodia to El Salvador and Panama. Steele was there to train the police and army just about anywhere murderous repression took place.

In Iraq, Steele was responsible for overseeing the establishment of the Special Police Commandos, including the notorious Wolf Brigade.

The Police Commandos are the most widely implicated of all the new formations in Iraq, but they are not commanded by religious fanatics.

Their leaders are drawn from former military personnel, including general Rashid Flayyih, who, though a Shia, is the man most closely associated with the suppression of the Shia rising following the first Gulf War, as well as being a CIA collaborator.

Neither the transfer of sovereignty to the interim government, nor the switching of regimes to the transitional one, made any impact on the careers of the carefully groomed assets within the new Iraqi state, quashing the media-cherished notion of de-Baathification.

The picture of mass murder and torture at the hands of US proxies emerging from Iraq is consistent with the experience of every other counter-insurgency war in which the US has been involved.

From Indonesia to El Salvador, hundreds of thousands of killings have been committed by US-backed and trained forces.

This is all to ensure continuing access to markets, cheap labour and raw materials, and to prevent the rise of economic and social alternatives that could deliver hope to the masses.

This multi-tiered operation means operatives like Steele select the most brutal accomplices they can find, while top-level planners direct dirty wars from lavish offices. Both sets are murderers.

But between them, and between the crimes and the public who would put an end to them, are the professional liars of the corporate media, who, in concealing the truth, are as complicit as the driller killers in the balaclavas.

Diyala - A Laboratory of Civil War?

A recent case study in the dynamics of occupation and sectarianism

Max Fuller, member of the *BRussells* Tribunal Advisory Committee.

(20 June 2006)

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Part 1:

Operation Knockout in Diyala Demonstrates US Collusion with Death Squads

In November last year Sunni members of the Diyala provincial council began to boycott meetings in protest at a 13 November raid on the provincial capital Baquba and surrounding towns, according to a [report](#) by UPI's Pentagon correspondent, Pamela Hess. According to a US military official, the boycotting council members sent a letter to the chairman of the council in which they alleged that that raid had been orchestrated by the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI) as part of a plan to disenfranchise Sunnis during the upcoming elections.

Such accusations chime with almost every commentator it seems both inside and outside Iraq, who have lavished criticism on SCIRI and the paramilitary militia known as the Badr Brigade associated with it. Whilst anti-occupation sources tend to regard SCIRI and Badr as US allies, the Western media have chosen to focus on their relationship with Iran, where they were primarily based since their foundation in 1982. In either case, commentators charge that SCIRI's militiamen have infiltrated or been amalgamated into Iraq's nascent security forces. Many reports make little or no distinction between the Badr Brigade and the security forces. In the Western media lens, this depiction tends to function as apologia for human rights abuses attributed to the security forces (for examples of this in action, see Soloman Moore [writing](#) in the Los Angeles Times or Jonathan Steele [writing](#) in the London Guardian).

Hess agrees with the media consensus, stating that 'anecdotal evidence of targeted and unsanctioned violence against Sunnis from cities across Iraq suggests Badr or other rogue elements have a presence throughout the ministry'. In the case of the Baquba raid which had prompted the walkout by Sunni councilors, Hess informs us that in this instance it was the Wolf Brigade, an 'Iraqi special police unit of some 2,000', that 'swept into Baqubah, the capital of Diyala province, and arrested some 300 people'.

As if to clarify matters, she then tells us, citing a US military source, that ‘The operation came in the wake of the appointment by the Shiite governor of Diyala of a new police chief for the province ... The new police chief has no law enforcement experience ... but he is associated with the SCIRI, the political arm of the Badr brigade’.

But in fact what initially appears to be an open and shut case is not so straightforward. While, according to the same military spokesperson, the governor may have requested the raid ‘to show that he’s got muscle to flex’, ‘US police assistance teams worked with the Wolf Brigade to plan the operation and American assets – including a surveillance drone, medical team and a quick reaction force – were assigned to support it’. Nonetheless, the spokesperson goes on to imply that support was reluctant, adding, ‘We put forces with each of their units so that we could watch them work’.

In the case of the 13 November raid, outside observers are fortunate that, unlike Pamela Hess, they do not have to rely solely on one military spokesperson feeding a line to the press. The raid in question was called Operation Knockout and was the first time that the Iraqi Special Police Forces of the Ministry of the Interior had planned, prepared and executed a division-size raid ‘designed to destroy or disrupt all of their [ie insurgents’] cells in a large locality in a single night’. For a far more in-depth depiction of the action, we can be grateful to US Army Col James K Greer, who was so impressed by the whole operation that he wrote an [account](#) of it for the November–December issue of *Military Review*.

The following passages are taken from Greer’s account.

In late October, the minister of the interior [Bayan Jabr] told the Operations Directorate to study options for a large-scale, simultaneous strike in Diyala against a large number of suspected insurgents and their support and information networks ...

[On 5 November] the Operations Directorate provided a list of insurgent and terrorist targets to the Public Order Division commander with a warning to be prepared to move to Ba’qubah and conduct operations to detain those targets.

The Public Order Division immediately began planning, focusing on developing target folders for the hundreds of discrete targets forces would have to secure. Simultaneously, Multi-National Force-Iraq (MNF-I) was notified through its cell in the MOI National Command Center. Planning and coordination continued with an MOI/Multinational Command-Iraq (MNC-I) meeting on 9 November ...

Throughout the planning and coordination stage of Operation Knockout, Special Police Transition Teams (SPTTs) under Colonel Gordon B. ‘Skip’ Davis and Colonel Jeffrey Buchanan advised the Iraqis and planned and coordinated their own support to the operation. These teams of 10 to 12 soldiers lived, trained, and fought alongside the Iraqi Special Police 24 hours a day and contributed

significantly to the Iraqi's development ...

At execution, Public Order Division elements, reinforced by a brigade of Iraqi Special Police commandos, moved along three separate routes to their objectives in and around Ba'qubah, conducting clean-up operations in small towns along the way ...

Operation Knockout demonstrated the necessity for and effectiveness of intelligence-based COIN [counterinsurgency] operations. The MOI Intelligence Office of the Operations Directorate spent several weeks developing the targets that would eventually be raided. Local informants confirmed potential targets, and the Intelligence Office produced one- to three-page papers detailing why each individual was targeted ... Special Police units developed a target folder for each individual. Surreptitious eyes-on provided last-minute updates to target sets.

In the rare case of Operation Knockout, we even have a third, official military [account](#) of proceedings given at a press briefing. This description adds one further important detail, which is that 70 per cent of the 377 detainees were Sunni, 30 per cent were Shia and 10 were Kurds. While these proportions may not accurately reflect the ethno-confessional makeup of Diyala province (exact figures are hard to come by), they do indicate that the raid was far from exclusively directed against Sunni targets, despite popular impression.

Implications of the reports

This illustration of an intelligence-based counterinsurgency operation undertaken by US-trained proxy forces, which could have been written just as well about Vietnam, the Philippines, El Salvador or present-day Colombia, reveals a number of important points about the conflict in Iraq.

(i) SCIRI had no part in orchestrating Operation Knockout

One of the most important conclusions to be drawn is that we can be certain SCIRI had absolutely nothing to do with the 13 November raid on Baquba and its environs. This simple fact discredits 99% of what has been written in the mainstream media about the role of SCIRI and Badr within the new Interior Ministry.

(ii) Even within Iraq it is very difficult to accurately assess security operations

It is striking in this case that, if we are to believe Hess's sources, even public representatives on the ground in Iraq are unable to distinguish between what they perceive to be sectarian paramilitaries and the forces operating directly on behalf of the Occupation. This is in no way intended to represent a criticism of those on the ground, but only highlights the duplicity of the US Imperial war machine, whose goal is to cover its own tracks and spread discord amongst its enemies.

(iii) The Wolf Brigade continues to be used by the media as a fob-off

It is extremely revealing of the mainstream media position that even in Hess's relatively detailed and

informative report, the responsibility for a joint MOI/MNF-I operation was subtly shifted towards SCIRI and that it was the Wolf Brigade which was reported to have carried out the raid. While Hess does not underline the point in this piece, the reference is unlikely to be missed altogether. The significance of the attribution is that in many media analyses of human rights abuses related to the Ministry of the Interior, the Wolf Brigade has been singled out for blame. Rather than seeking to analyze its structure, most commentators have been content to describe it as a police commando unit attached to the Interior Ministry with a specifically Shiite leaning (for instance, see the [Knight Ridder report](#) by Hannah Allam, now very hard to find on the Internet). In this UPI report, the US military spokesperson describes the Wolf Brigade as a ‘public order Brigade’ rather than as police commandos. In fact, the MOI special police forces are made up of both police commandos and public order brigades, all of them trained and supported by embedded advisors from MNF-I. According to Greer’s account, the 13 November raid was planned by a Public Order Division and was conducted by Public Order Division elements, reinforced by a brigade of Special Police Commandos, probably the Wolf Brigade. The effect of the UPI report is once again to divert attention from structure and organization and frame discourse within narrow sectarian lines that exclude US responsibility.

(iv) Counterinsurgency operations are not in the remit of backroom militias

In view of the persistent reports that the majority of extrajudicial killings can be attributed to members of the security forces following the detention of the victims (eg [UN Human Rights Mission](#), [Iraqi Organization for Follow-up and Monitoring](#)), it is beholden on all interested parties to take any insight into the workings of those forces and the processes by which ‘targets’ are selected for arrest with the utmost seriousness. Yet no journalist has so much as mentioned the existence of an Operations Directorate, still less MNF-I’s cell within the MOI National Command Center, while the one journalist that seems to have written about Operation Knockout has fallen back into the familiar groove of ‘allegiance to Shiite groups’ etc. The reason that I have quoted from Greer’s account at such length is to demonstrate the enormous behind-the-scenes effort required to conduct counterinsurgency warfare.

To reiterate the stages by which targets were selected:

- 1) Two months before the operation the intelligence section of the Operations Directorate began preparing a list of suspects based on intelligence gleaned from local informers;
- 2) The intelligence section produced dossiers on individual suspects;
- 3) One week before the operation the intelligence section passed the list of suspects to the Public Order Division commander;
- 4) The Public Order Division prepared folders on the individual suspects, making use of an airborne mapping capability;
- 5) Before commencement of the operation, last minute visual checks were made of individual suspects.

In the case of Operation Knockout, which seems to have half-served as PR exercise, Greer et al are falling over themselves to persuade their audience that the police behaved in exemplary fashion and

that detainees were treated humanely. So how far is it possible to regard this operation as representative and how should we evaluate such operations in human rights terms?

Beyond Knockout

By far the most important aspect of this operation from an analytical perspective is that it was 'Intelligence Based'. It is quite clear from Greer's description that what that means in layman's terms is that lists of targets were put together in some sort of centralized planning hub before being passed to individual police units responsible for seizing them in the middle of the night.

Whilst nothing like the level of detail offered in Greer's report is available for most of the cases of arrest and extrajudicial killing by the security forces, in a few accounts we do have evidence that the victims have been selected based on lists of suspects (eg see [Sydney Morning Herald, 11 March 2006](#), [Reuters, 17 November 2005](#)), These details are the hallmarks of 'intelligence based' counterinsurgency operations and strongly indicate that most or all of the campaigns of mass arrests taking place nightly across Iraq emanate from the intelligence offices of the Interior Ministry. This impression is further reinforced by another [UPI account](#) of an earlier raid that took place in Baghdad in June 2004. Once again, we are told that the lists of suspects (in this case ordinary criminals) had been meticulously prepared in advance through the use of informers by the intelligence branch at the Ministry of the Interior, incidentally under the command of a Sunni Kurd.

Such operations simply cannot be conceived and carried out from some backroom at Badr or Mahdi HQ. If we were still to persist in advocating that SCIRI, or some such party, was behind these operations, against all of the available evidence, we would also be forced to conclude that the US had ceased to have influence inside the Interior Ministry, unless of course they were acting in tandem. In fact, we know that Iraq's entire new intelligence apparatus was built by the CIA (see [Washington Post, 11 December 2003](#), [Knight Ridder, 8 May 2005](#)) and we can be certain that the intelligence offices at the Interior Ministry and elsewhere remain saturated with US intelligence agents/advisors ([New York Times, 14 December 2005](#)).

And despite reassurances from the US military that Knockout represents the new style of 'humane' Interior Ministry operation, the empirical evidence keeps mounting up, day upon day, week upon week and month upon month, that death squads are continuing their genocidal campaign without stint. The [latest figures](#) from Baghdad suggest that an average of 70 new victims of extrajudicial execution appear in the Morgue every single day and these are now starting to be [backed up](#) in Basra, where we told that on average one person is killed per hour.

Let us pray that in this case the more than 300 detainees taken during Operation Knockout have indeed been treated humanely. In this case it is beholden not just on the Iraqi Ministry of the Interior but on Multi Nation Force-Iraq to demonstrate that every one of the people seized from the Baquba vicinity on 13 November has either been released or continues to be held in 'humane conditions'. If

MNF-I really wants to prove that it is not responsible for the death squads, it must publicly release the names of all 377 supposed suspects so that the world can see who it is arresting and tell us where they are today. It needs to prove to its critics that the human rights of its detainees have been respected and that they have not been hung by their wrists until their arms are dislocated or beaten until it is impossible to tell the color of their skin, or burnt with cigarettes, or had their eyes gouged out or their fingernails removed. MNF-I needs to prove that one of its proxy policemen hasn't tortured a single one of them with an electric drill and thrown their body onto the street like the other thousand that appear every month in Baghdad. It needs to prove it, because otherwise we'll know for sure that this time it ordered it!

Part 2:

Out for the count? Interpreting conflicting narratives

Operation Knockout proved to be no final engagement for the security forces either in Diyala province or just around Baquba. Since then the social and political space has been dominated by at least five forms of violence. The following analysis is drawn from a trawl of mainstream Western media sources on the Internet and from a day by day examination of Iraqi Resistance reports compiled by [Free Arab Voice](#) between 13 November and the middle of May. It is not intended to be seen as comprehensive.

(i) Police/army raids

Resistance reports make reference to around a dozen supplemental raids since Operation Knockout in which hundreds more Iraqis have been detained. No information is available about the fate of the detainees and detailed reports of the raids themselves are absent. The raids are variously described as having been undertaken by 'troops', 'Interior Ministry Shock Troops', 'US occupation forces backed up by Iraqi puppet army troops', 'Interior Ministry troops', 'militiamen with official government documents issued by the Ministry of the Interior', etc. From such descriptions it is difficult to know which units were responsible, although in most cases one suspects units of the Special Police. Western media sources do not make identification any easier and fewer raids have been reported.

(ii) Resistance attacks against US/Iraqi security forces, including killings of alleged collaborators and members of Shiite militias

Most of these attacks took the form of roadside bombs, but well-orchestrated assaults on police/army bases and checkpoints were also frequently reported. A handful of alleged 'collaborators' are also reported to have been executed by Resistance fighters.

(iii) 'Mysterious' bombings

Several bombs which exploded in civilian areas were described in Resistance reports as mysterious. Mosques seem to have been the intended targets in several instances; one is reported to have been Sunni, one Shiite, and two others are not attributed. Other targets included a girls' school and a crowded market. According to a [report](#) for Middle East Online, dated 1 May 2006, the police chief of Baquba claimed that 70 bombs had been planted on the city streets in the preceding two weeks alone,

of which 40 had gone off, killing 12 people.

(iv) Extrajudicial killings and assassinations

Several instances of extrajudicial killings bearing the hallmarks of death squads have been reported. On 23 December 2005 three bodies were found with multiple gunshot wounds in Southern Baquba; the bodies were found blindfolded with their hands and legs bound. On 23 February gunmen pulled factory workers off buses and killed 47 of them; the bullet-riddled bodies were found behind a brick factory. On 25 February 2006 13 members of a Shia family were killed in their home by gunmen. On the same day, 12 farm laborers, both Sunnis and Shiites, were found shot dead in an orchard; the victims had been shot in the head and face. On 26 February two boys were killed when gunmen opened fire on a group of teenagers playing football. On 28 February nine bodies were found in wasteland around Tarfiya; the victims had been shot in the head. On 27 March at least 18 bodies of males were found in a deserted brush area around Tarfiya; the victims are variously described as having been decapitated or having been shot in the head. On 8 April 10 bodies were found in black body bags in Balad Rooz; the victims had been shot in the head. On 19 April three professors were killed when gunmen opened fire at Diyala University. On 10 May 11 workers at an electrical plant were killed by gunmen on their way from or to work. On 13 May four unidentified bodies with bullet holes in their heads and chests were dumped in a stream in Khan Bani Saad; according to one report they were Shiites. It should be noted that the spike in reports after 23 February may well represent increased media attention following the bombing of the Askari mosque in Samarra, rather than any quantifiable surge in attacks.

(v) Ethnic cleansing

According to *Quds Press*, quoted in a Resistance report for 8 March, around 1000 Sunni families have fled their homes in the Madain area after receiving death threats from members of the police and special police.

While these accounts of various forms of violence and intimidation undoubtedly reflect a climate of pervasive and widespread violence, including an ongoing struggle between the forces of occupation and an organic resistance, it is extremely difficult to make objective comments about their significance. The following passages drawn from four separate accounts underline this point.

a) *'If the insurgency stays at this level, I expect to free up combat power before the end of our deployment,' [US Col] Salazar says.*

[The Nation, 9 April 2006](#)

b) *In this confessionally divided provincial capital [Baquba] just north of Baghdad, the mounting sectarian tensions that have gripped the new Iraq have spelled a spate of tit-for-tat killings of civilians as Shiite militiamen avenge attacks by Sunni insurgents, sparking a vicious circle of violence ...*

"Drive-by shootings and other gun attacks have proved deadlier, killing nearly 40 people in the past two weeks," Bawi said ...

The apparent impotence of Iraq's fledgling security forces in the face of the worsening bloodshed has sparked anger among residents.

[Middle East Online, 1 May 2006](#)

c) *rebels spread control over most of Diyala Province of which the city of Baquba is the capital.*

The city's nearly 350,000 live in a state of terror as the security forces charged with keeping law and order can hardly protect themselves.

[Azzaman, 11 May 2006](#)

d) *Mrs Mohammed is a Kurd and a Shia in Baquba, which has a majority of Sunni Arabs. Her husband, Ahmed, who traded fruit in the local market, said: "They threaten the Kurds and the Shia and told them to get out ..."*

It was impossible to travel to Baquba, the capital of Diyala, from Baghdad without extreme danger

[Independent, 20 May 2006](#)

It should be noted that the US assessment referred to here predated a major increase in attacks against occupation forces that began towards the end of April, which might well invalidate the opinion expressed by US Col Salazar.

Nonetheless, even comparing these descriptions of the overall situation with the various accounts of violence that are available is far from straightforward. The account in Middle East Online indicates a level of violence against civilians that is not adequately reflected in either the mainstream media nor the Resistance reports. However, it remains credible because we know the same relationship would hold in areas where we have a better overall impression of the extent of the violence.

Uniting the narratives

The accounts offered in the *Independent* and *Azzaman* appear to stand in total opposition to one another. If the Resistance has spread control over Diyala, surely a communitarian civil war of the kind alluded to in the *Independent* is extremely unlikely to be taking place. That is, unless we are prepared to entertain a very special definition of 'civil war'. Such a definition would require us to accept that the Resistance represents an exclusively Sunni faction (not even borne out in the US military's statistics for detained suspects, see above) and that the security forces, especially the counterinsurgency brigades, represent an exclusively Shiite faction (not borne out in any [credible analysis](#) of their composition, nor in their relationship to the occupying powers, including the presence of special police transition teams). Thus, with a fierce conflict taking place between the Occupation and the Resistance,

it might indeed be possible to conclude that a 'sectarian civil war' was underway. This seems to be the preferred definition for the Western media establishment.

But what of Mrs Mohammed? It is possible that angry Sunnis have responded to perceived sectarian assaults in kind, but, assuming that this story is real, it seems much more likely that she and her family are the victims of a cruel deception designed to fracture the country along ethno-confessional lines. More and more evidence of such a pattern is starting to emerge, including a [recent account](#) published by the *BRussells* Tribunal anonymously from within Iraq, which refers to evidence that the same special covert units are employed to fabricate sectarian attacks against both Sunni and Shiite Iraqis. In addition, there are indications that other killings are being carried out by death squads operating from within the paramilitary [Facilities Protection Service](#).

If we want to make sense of what is happening in Iraq we need to recognize that words like SCIRI, Badr and Mahdi, together with phrases like civil war, sectarian violence, revenge killings and tit-for-tat murders all serve to deemphasize the centrality of the occupation and mystify what is a very real and deadly counterinsurgency war.

From an external perspective, it is extremely difficult to discern whether the Resistance has seized control of Diyala or whether a genuine civil war along sectarian lines has broken out. What we must suspect, though, based on concrete reasoning, is that the security forces trained, armed and guided by the British and Americans will be committing terrible crimes against humanity in their role as attack dogs for the occupation.

This is not to try to say that every single killing is carried out by the security forces, but it is to say that the security forces are so obviously involved in a great many cases that the Western media and other apologists for the occupation and abettors of genocide have been forced to resort to claiming that the security forces have been infiltrated by various militias. If there are militias in the Ministry of Interior, you can be sure that they are militias that stand to attention whenever a US colonel enters the room. And if there are masked gunmen claiming to be from Badr of Mahdi or anywhere else, the first question we should all be asking is where did they get their lists of victims from? For my money, they will have come straight out of the Intelligence Office of the Operations Directorate at the US-run Ministry of the Interior.

Appendix: The Memory Vortex

Communities fight back against raids

Two reports in May seem to indicate that communities are seeking ways to fight back against nighttime raids. According to an Iraqi Resistance [report](#) dated 1 May 2006, citing *Mafkarat al-Islam*, fierce fighting erupted around the areas of al-Hadid and Abu Zayd when a raid by 'Iraqi puppet police and puppet army troops' was opposed by armed residents. According to the report, nine of the assailants and dozens of locals were killed in the fighting. Following the battle, US troops joined the

Iraqi forces in carrying out massive and indiscriminate arrests.

On 11 May, international press sources [reported](#) that village leaders and clerics alerted police and US soldiers when gunmen, some of them wearing military uniforms, raided two ‘Sunni’ villages near Khan Bani Saad. According to these reports, US and Iraqi forces were able to rescue seven of 10 men that were being abducted. Thirty people were arrested, including an unknown number of the gunmen. According to the reports, some gunmen told police they belonged to the Shiite militia loyal to Muqtada al-Sadr. This attribution was supported by the Interior Minister at the time, Bayan Jabr, who claimed that the gunmen were carrying badges identifying them as belonging to the Force Protection Service (FPS) of the Ministry of Health, which has been reported to be under the control of Muqtada al-Sadr. A spokesman for al-Sadr subsequently claimed that the FPS members had gone to help, according to the [Christian Science Monitor](#).

It is difficult to believe that these two accounts are not related despite the time gap, although I can find no evidence that this is the case. It is also difficult not to credit the *Mafkarat al-Islam* as being a far more plausible general depiction of events. Clearly, if Sadr militiamen had formed a secret death squad to attack villages around Khan Bani Saad, we should be hearing about it all over the press. Unfortunately, this is yet another case ‘under investigation’ that is likely to be consigned to the dustbin of history and blacked out by the Western media.

Diyala police linked to death squads

On 27 March, in what was described as ‘an unusual admission’, Reuters [reported](#) that the Iraqi Interior Ministry had arrested a police major, Arkan al-Bawi, in Diyala province for operating death squads in Baquba. According to the Interior Ministry, [Bawi confessed](#) that his gang members wore police uniforms stolen during attacks on police checkpoints and that they had killed many people. On 28 March, Reuters [reported](#) that the police chief in Diyala, major-general Ghassan al-Bawi, the brother of Arkan, had been arrested for ‘corruption and threatening security’. Unbelievably, even this bombshell of a story died instantly [in fact, the story now seems to have been removed from the Internet; the version offered here is copied from a printed extract of the original]. Even more remarkably, on 28 April, provincial police chief Maj. Ghassan al-Bawi was [reported](#) to have stated that troops and police were on the streets of Baquba and roads to the city were closed because of fears the insurgents might regroup [This story too is now extremely hard to come by, with only two examples still available through Google; the only other evidence that Ghassan al-Bawi has retained his post is a cached BBC page which refers to an interview with al-Bawi in June 2006]. It appeared that the arrest of two senior police officers linked to death squads in Diyala had simply not taken place at all. Perhaps it was a case of mistaken identity. Perhaps it was another major-general Ghassan al-Bawi that had been arrested for ‘threatening security’!

If we go right back to Hess’s UPI report of the November 13 raid, we will recall that the new police chief ‘is associated with the SCIRI, the political arm of the Badr brigade’. Is that not then newsworthy either! Mahdi militiamen in death squad arrested in act and SCIRI police appointee linked to death

squads! Apparently not. One can only assume that any detailed independent investigation would rapidly be forced to conclude that neither Mahdi nor SCIRI were responsible, but the US-installed police force were.

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Conflicting Media Accounts: Evidence of Iraqi Death Squad Conspiracy

Max Fuller, 26 June 2006.

On 27 October 2005, the BBC reported the following incident.

At least 20 Shia militiamen and Iraqi policemen have died in clashes with Sunni insurgents, Iraqi officials say.

Most of those killed were Mahdi Army militiamen loyal to radical Shia cleric Moqtada Sadr. Two Iraqi policemen were also killed and others wounded.

A spokesman for the militiamen said they were ambushed as they went with police to aid a comrade kidnapped by Sunni militants near Baghdad.

Some reports said the clash resulted from tensions between the communities.

Whether it involves insurgents or not, it is clearly a case of Sunnis fighting Shias - an alarming development in a country where the fear of civil war is increasingly coming to the fore, says the BBC's Jim Muir in Baghdad.

The battle took place in the town of Nahrawan, some 15 miles (25km) south-east of Baghdad.

Yet, on the same day and describing the same incident, Thomas Wagner, filed the following report for Associated Press, BBC, Deutsche Presse-Agentur and Reuters.

At least 27 people, most of them police, were killed in clashes with civilians in Nahrawan township, 30 kilometres south of Baghdad, Thursday, said Iraqi army sources.

Captain Ahmed Jassin of the Iraqi army told Deutsche Presse- Agentur dpa that forces belonging to two brigades of the Interior Ministry launched a raid in Al-Haj village of Nahrawan to release a kidnapped person.

He said the police were in civilian uniform, prompting the villagers to open fire thinking that the police were terrorists. Jassim's army brigade intervened to end the fighting.

He said the severe clashes which took place killed 25 policemen and two civilians. Four villagers were arrested.

Police in civilian uniform! What on earth are readers supposed to make of that in the context of a conflict that has seen thousands of people arrested, tortured and subsequently murdered by members of the police and security forces (eg [UN Human Rights Mission](#), [Iraqi Organization for Follow-up and Monitoring](#)).

More than merely arousing suspicion, Wagner's report recalls the [recent reference](#) to an anonymous confession by an Iraqi purporting to belong to a secret black operations unit. In the confession, the author states that special Iraqi forces were created before and after the occupation by US and Israeli officers to infiltrate all of the branches of the new security apparatus. Once in position, these agents have been used to fabricate sectarian attacks against both Sunnis and Shiites. According to the confession, they attack Sunnis 'in uniforms, IDs and police cars' and they attack Shiites 'in cars normally used by the Mujahideen' and undoubtedly 'in civilian uniform'. Clearly, the 'Shia militiamen' at Nahrawan were at pains not to be identified as police, so were their intended victims in this case Shiite?

It's hard to know. According to an [Iraqi Resistance Report](#) compiled by Free Arab Voice, the Sunni resistance organization Jaysh Ansar as-Sunnah posted a statement on the Internet in which they claimed that forces of the National Guard and puppet police, who had arrived in 50 white non-military pickups, attempted to arrest local men during morning prayers. A violent confrontation developed in which local villagers and residents of nearby villages joined forces against the raiders. According to the Jaysh Ansar as-Sunnah version of events, Mahdi militiamen fought alongside the security forces.

From an alternative perspective, Shaykh 'Ali al-Musawi', a leader of the Sadr movement in Diyala Province stated that 'what a number of members of the Jaysh al-Mahdi or its patrons [??] did should not be counted against the Muqtada as-Sadr movement as a whole' and that the movement 'is united with the Resistance on one goal and that is the definite requirement that the American occupation must depart Iraq and that the unity of Iraq – the land and the people – must be safeguarded' (op cit.).

Whether or not the forces that participated in this incident were part of a covert operations unit isn't particularly important. What is important is that they were not the Shiite militiamen linked to

Muqtada al-Sadr that the BBC wants us to believe. Infiltrated or not, they belonged to two brigades of the Interior Ministry and were disowned by the Sadr movement. If further militiamen really were present, they attacked as auxiliaries to the police units.

All of this is particularly significant in view of the number of supposedly sectarian attacks that have been taking place in the Nahrawan area as part of a campaign of terrorization and ethnic cleansing.

The [best-documented](#) case involves an assault on the village of Al-Fursan by 'hordes of men in black, who were driving cars of the ministry of interior' on 27 February 2006. Eight people, including a 10-year-old boy, were executed and property and livestock was destroyed. According to Voice of Freedom and Human Rights and the Red Crescent, the residents did not try to protect themselves because they believed the killers to be police. In this case the victims appear to have been Sunni families.

Similar attacks are [reported](#) to have occurred against Shiite families.

If you can find them, maybe you can hire ... the Mahdi Army!

According to Paul McGeough of the [Sydney Morning Herald](#), the mayor of Nahrawan has turned to the Mahdi Army to provide security for his 'Shiite' ward in the absence of alternative law-enforcement agencies capable of taking on the 'insurgency'. Of course, McGeough knows perfectly well, [as does Edward Wong](#) of the New York Times, that the Mahdi Army that they're talking about is the one that receives its uniforms, weapons, training and salaries from the US-sponsored state. For such commentators, the solution to this apparent contradiction is to conclude that the militias draw their pay by day and conduct their real business by night.

So is McGeough claiming that the mayor of Nahrawan is content to only receive his protection after hours from some yawning militiamen who've only just had time to change out of their uniforms before undertaking raids? Or, if there's a grain of truth to his story, is he suggesting that the mayor is actually benefiting from the presence of units of the Iraqi security forces? If so, it would be more helpful if he would tell his readers which ones. We can assume that they're not ordinary policemen because Nahrawan already has ordinary policemen. So what does that leave? It essentially leaves units of the Iraqi special police, either Public Order Battalions or Special Police Commandos.

In fact, the description of both the 27 October and 27 February raids sound very much like the kind of operations being undertaken by the specialist counterinsurgency units attached to the Ministry of the Interior. The members of such units might or might not have belonged to the Mahdi Army or the Badr Brigade, but within the units of the Special Police they live, work and fight alongside embedded US special-forces trainers. And, even more importantly, their operations are carefully planned by the new CIA-built intelligence apparatus and orchestrated by American intelligence operatives (see '[Operation Knockout: Coin in Iraq](#)').

Whichever way you want to cut it, the bungled raid of 27 October is yet one more example of the US-directed war being actively waged against the Iraqi people and Jim Muir is yet one more example of

the liars of the mainstream media who are attempting to cover up the tracks of their genocidal colleagues. In view of the lack of credible reporting and the terrible gravity of the events unfolding, the only immediate solution is to demand independent investigations by international bodies into what is taking place. Who could possibly oppose so utterly reasonable and humane a demand? Only those whose hands are steeped in blood and those devoted to protecting them.

¡Nunca Olvida! Never Forget!

The US role in Iraq's death squads

Max Fuller, member of the *BRussells* Tribunal Advisory Committee.

(July 2006)

Hector Gomez Calito's body was found by the road, 18 miles outside Guatemala City, his legs and stomach burnt, his tongue cut out.

'Death in the Afternoon', Edwin Charles, *New Socialist* April 1986

The year was 1986 and Guatemala had just just emerged from 31 years of military dictatorship. The death toll stood at 138,000 since the CIA-engineered coup of 1954. The government had officially blamed the violence on everything from foreigners to the heat, yet most of the victims had been 'disappeared' by the various branches of the security forces (or private death squads largely made up of moonlighting members of the police or army), armed, trained and supported by the US military. Guatemala's democratic 'opening' made little difference to the disenfranchised majority struggling for basic rights; nor did it halt the ravages of the security forces, which found themselves in a stronger position, free to pursue their internally directed war behind a 'constitutional veneer'. By 1989 the death toll for the decade alone had reached some 100,000 killed and another 40,000 disappeared.

You can find a similar story in El Salvador, where the US felt it necessary, first, to engineer a civilian, José Napoléon Duarte, as president in 1980 and then to insist on constitutional (1982) and presidential (1984) elections. Such a commitment to 'democracy' provided the necessary gloss for the massive expansion of US military involvement under the Reagan administration, leading to a decade of brutal internal conflict. In fact, the US [ran the war](#) in El Salvador through a handful of assets in key positions and a military mission whose role was to create counterinsurgency forces to take the war to the guerrilla while the bulk of the armed forces held static positions. The result was a genocidal war of aggression against the Salvadoran population, whose targets, as [Chomsky reminds us](#), were 'peasants, labour organizers, students, priests or anyone suspected of working in the interests of the people'.

The full extent of the US role in El Salvador was not evident at the time. It has taken the courage of dedicated investigators in truth commissions, the heartbreaking work of forensic anthropologists and the first-hand testimonies of former soldiers and torturers to break the conspiracy of silence.

Serious scholars and activists of Latin American history, and US Imperialism in general, have learned to recognize the role and impact of US involvement in ‘counterinsurgency’ wars. A whole [movement](#) in the US is dedicated to closing down the notorious School of the Americas (recently renamed the Western Hemisphere School of Security Cooperation), because activists know that despite the human rights courses and the lessons in bomb disposal, many of the war criminals that have plagued Latin America over recent decades are the alumni of that academy of war.

Such activists have also learned to mistrust the Western media, which has consistently misrepresented or failed to report the horrific crimes committed by US proxy armies. Those activists have listened closely to the voices of the people in struggle and recorded their testimonies as part of their campaign to bring an end to US military training and assistance programs. Laboratories have been established on the ground to investigate and analyze the crimes of the state, as well as to dignify the memories of the victims. Uncovering the truth is not a matter of taking selected quotations from mainstream press articles or reading through blogs, but of building real links with organizations rooted in popular struggle.

In relation to the ongoing occupation and destruction of Iraq, activists and analysts like myself have scoured the information available at a distance and have tried to hear and understand the voices coming from the ground to the best of our ability. It is not a substitute for the kind of real solidarity work that I have been describing, but, for those of us who have looked at the US mode of war, it is enough to recognize the evidence of active US involvement with death squads and genocidal intelligence-based counterinsurgency operations – and we have tried to continue hearing those Iraqi voices despite the ceaseless cacaphony of disinformation put out by the Occupying powers and disseminated by the entire apparatus of the corporate media in their thrall.

In a very concrete sense, we have tried to hang a monumental question mark on the mightiest propagandist machine the world has ever known. In so doing, speaking for myself, I have questioned every assumption that I hold day after day, time after time and always been forced back to the same position: that the supposed sectarian violence afflicting Iraq is entirely an artifice of the Occupation and that British and American imperialism is not only attempting to fabricate a civil war, but is directly responsible for the vast majority of the violence, including the death squads.

It is no surprise to find that these views are challenged by such apologists as Stephen Zunes, who [writes](#) that ‘there is little evidence to suggest that US trainers have actively encouraged death squad activity’ (just as there is no ‘evidence’ that Negroponte knew anything about the death squads in El Salvador or Honduras) despite an avalanche of material available to any prepared to look. Nor is it any surprise that [these views are ridiculed](#) at such bastions of learning as the Conflict Studies Research Centre of the Defence Academy of the UK.

But it comes as a shock to find these arguments under assault from commentators criticizing an [article](#) in which I called for an independent investigation into the killings of three lawyers defending Saddam

Hussein and other members of the former Iraqi government on the grounds that I have not heard and understood what is happening in Iraq. Their argument is that rather than focusing on US control of the Iraqi security apparatus, we should be looking at the involvement of Iraq's two most famous Shiite militias, the Mahdi Army of Radical Cleric Muqtada al Sadr and the Badr Brigade, linked to the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq.

There are both micro and macro dimensions to the criticism of my article, both of which I would like to have the opportunity to address. The micro dimensions consist in a detailed critique of my article along the following lines.

1) I claimed that the murdered lawyer Khamis al-Obeidi had been hauled from his home in the middle of the night by Interior Ministry representatives when in fact, according to his bereaved wife, 20 men in civilian clothes who identified themselves as members of a ministry security brigade burst into their home in the early hours of the morning while the family slept; Mr Obeidi had little chance to reply before he was seized. It is hard to see how my rendering of the event differs notably from the related facts, which of course formed the basis of my account.

2) I failed to mention that Mehdi Army militiamen are reported to have paraded Mr Obeidi around the Al Thawra (Sadr City) district of Baghdad before his murder and subsequently celebrated his killing with refreshments in the streets. It is true that I did not refer to this account on one blog that is no longer available, but only referred to the disposal of My Obeidi's body under an image of the Ayatollah al-Sadr, Muqtada al-Sadr's father. However, my point was that most murderers try to conceal their crimes or transpose the blame to others. A [spokesman](#) for Muqtada al-Sadr 'angrily denied' the accusations. It should also be noted that the account of militiamen parading Mr Obeidi refers to a Mehdi Army leader named Abu Der'ra. Perhaps they would have heard the [residents of Sadr City](#) who denied that Abu Deraa was a resident of the area, or even the Thawra councilman and senior Sadr official, who insisted that Deraa is not a member of the Mehdi Army. In fact, Deraa is being referred to as the 'Shiite Zarqawi' and, I suggest, is just as much a [psyop](#).

3) I failed to discuss an aspect of the background to the killings of the three lawyers, namely that Muqtada al-Sadr and two of his spokesmen had made hostile comments towards the trial of Saddam Hussein. I would like to deal with the various comments separately.

(i) The most substantively [incriminating comment](#) was made by Shaikh Raid al-Kadhimi in July 2004 from the 'pulpit of Baghdad's Kadhimiya Shrine'. The problem with using this as evidence against Muqtada al-Sadr is that Kadhimi seems an unreliable spokesman. Kadhimi himself had been in [exile in Syria](#) for a number of years before the US invasion (unlike Muqtada al-Sadr) and the Kadhimiya Shrine where he spoke has been [strongly linked](#) with another al-Sadr, Muqtada's uncle Hussein al-Sadr, who was not only also in exile, but [strongly supported the US invasion](#) and dines with Colin Powell. Hussein al-Sadr is not close to Muqtada, but is [closely associated](#) with US/UK intelligence asset Ayad Allawi.

(ii) Shaik Awad Khafaji and Muqtada al-Sadr are both reported to have demanded the execution of Saddam Hussein. I don't have to agree with their position to point out that in neither statement, as far as I am aware, were specific threats made against the lawyers themselves. From Muqtada al-Sadr's position, one possible outcome of killing the defence lawyers must surely be the removal of the trial to a country where the death penalty would not even be an option. On every count it would be an act of unbridled stupidity on al-Sadr's part to sanction the murder of Saddam Hussein's lawyers and there is no evidence that he has done so.

The point of my article was to emphasize the role of the US-built Ministry of the Interior and its forces and to argue that there is abundant grounds to suspect British and American involvement in most of the killings taking place, quite apart from any moral or legal argument that they are responsible by dint of being in occupation. In taking this position I was in fact listening to many of the voices I hear coming from Iraq, as well as to the victims and fighters, alive and dead, from every other US imperialist aggression.

For instance, I was listening to the murdered lawyer Khamis Obeidi, who stated, 'The government bears the responsibility because it is supposed to protect the citizens. If there were a serious investigation into the previous murder of Janabi and the perpetrators had been arrested, we would not see today's crime.'

I was listening to Saddam Hussein's chief lawyer Khalil al-Dulaimi, who said, 'We strongly condemn this act [the killing of Mr Obeidi] and we condemn the killings done by the Interior Ministry against Iraqis.'

I was listening to Freedom Voice Society for Human Rights, which is [calling for a factfinding mission](#) of the UN, the Arab League or International Organisations and wants peacekeeping forces to protect civilians.

I was listening to an Iraqi professor who [wrote](#) that his colleagues were being killed by professional assassins, none of whom have been arrested; he said 'nobody has taken responsibility, and reasons have not been clarified.'

I was listening to the Shiite farmers who wake up to find typewritten flyers on their doorsteps telling them to leave the mixed communities where they have shared their whole lives with their Sunni neighbors and relatives.

I was listening to the boy whose ears were burnt off in a fire in a police station where he should never have been but was held for stealing some lengths of electrical cable in order to live.

I was listening to the street vendors forced off their pitch by the police and left with no means of subsistence.

I was listening to the workers encountered by Naomi Klein who said they would rather blow up their factory with themselves in it than see it privatized.

I was listening to tales of torture and horror coming out of every US-installed detention facility and every 'security' unit given unnatural life by US trainers.

I was listening to the Iraqi [Organization for follow-up and monitoring](#) who stated: "After exact

counting and documenting, the Iraqi Organisation for Follow-up and Monitoring has confirmed that 92 % of the 3498 bodies found in different regions of Iraq have been arrested by officials of the Ministry of Interior. Nothing was known about the arrestees' fate until their riddled bodies were found with marks of horrible torture. It's regrettable and shameful that these crimes are being suppressed and that several states receive government officials, who fail to investigate these crimes."

The 'macro dimension' to criticisms of my article actually has very little to do with the substance of the particular piece. Their real objection is that in consistently drawing on detailed evidence, including US military sources, to examine the role of the US military-intelligence apparatus within the ongoing violence in Iraq, I have systematically downplayed the involvement of the Badr Brigade and the Mehdi Army.

The truth is that, aside from anecdotal allegations from fairly [spurious sources](#), there is no publicly available information on the organisation or structure of either group and spokespersons for both of them assiduously deny their involvement. Even more significantly, Muqtada al-Sadr has been steadfast in opposing sectarianism, as Dahr Jamail, amongst others, has [noted](#). Such a stance simply does not square with his characterisation as one of the arch villains in an internally driven conflict. You don't need to be an Islamist to see that. Even that other arch fiend, Bayan Jabr, whose [offices crawled with US agents](#), appeared out of his depth, desperately thrusting passports at impassive journalists who would rather crucify him with letters than pose a single rudimentary question about US collusion. Yet no charges are forthcoming against Jabr and it is the US state, not he, that has the more distinguished pedigree in violence.

What we do have is a growing body of eyewitness testimonies from Iraqis asserting the presence of members of one or other militia group. Such assertions are blown out of all proportion within the mainstream western media by writers who have never seriously questioned the role of US military-intelligence advisors in orchestrating the death squads despite a barrage of evidence. The views of journalists who take this line can be discarded as trash, but not those of the Iraqis, who, undoubtedly, genuinely see the involvement of both Badr and Mehdi militiamen.

The problem with such testimonies is not in their credibility but in their ability to perceive the structures and follow the chains of command of the various armed groups that are assaulting them. Despite truisms, the truth is that sometimes you can feel the effect of the lash, but not see the hand that is wielding it.

The most consistent detail in all accounts of raids and arrests/kidnappings is the presence of members of the new Iraqi armed forces, be they members of the National Guard (now regular army), blue-shirted policemen or paramilitary members of the Special (now National) Police. This phenomenon is so pointed that no one can seriously discuss the role of militias as death squads without qualifying their position by arguing that these militias have integrated themselves within branches of the security forces to the extent that they have become essentially indistinguishable from the security forces, with

the security forces themselves (parts of them at least) now operating as the sectarian militias. Empirically, this is an extraordinarily weak position, as I have [attempted to argue](#) with detailed examinations of the relationship between such forces and the US military-intelligence apparatus.

What this leaves essentially are the eyewitnesses who report seeing members of one or other militia operating **alongside** members of the security forces.

So who are the ‘militiamen’ that Iraqis have seen and, in the case of the recent raids in Adhamiya, even captured? One possible answer is that they are the same plainclothes intelligence operatives that a UPI journalist [witnessed](#) participating in a Baghdad raid in June 2004, well before anyone had charged that the Ministry of the Interior or any Iraqi police forces had been infiltrated by Shiite militiamen. Such intelligence operatives might also constitute the mysterious Field Intelligence Units that Gen Rasheed Flayih, the head of the Police Commandos, uses as a euphemism for the death squads. Might such units be made up of ‘militiamen’? We know they are, or at least that they were. From the outset of the occupation, the CIA [took the ‘top intelligence agents’](#) from each of the main exile political groups and hammered them into the Collection Management and Analysis Directorate, which was to become the new *Mukhabharat* under the Sunni former Baathist general Mohammed Abdullah Shahwani. In November 2003 the Occupation authority [formed a paramilitary unit](#) ‘composed of militiamen from the country’s five largest political parties’ to ‘track down insurgents’. I drew attention to all of this in my article [‘Crying Wolf: Media Disinformation and Death Squads in Occupied Iraq’](#). Do these agents knock on people’s doors saying ‘I’m from the Badr Brigade’? I sincerely doubt it, but even if they do, it is no reason to situate the intelligence apparatus underlying Iraq’s death squads anywhere but, ultimately, with the Occupying forces. For instance, we know that the raids conducted by the paramilitary Special Police are [overseen by Multi National Force-Iraq](#) operatives. A second possibility is that local ‘defence’ forces of the kinds seen in Latin America are being organized by the state and deliberately given a sectarian character. If such units exist (I have seen no evidence that they do), they too will operate within the framework of the Occupation’s military-intelligence apparatus.

The one thing that is really certain, is that whoever these militiamen are, they would not be able to operate without the active collusion of the Ministry of the Interior and the Occupation forces. This fact is crystal clear when we consider that units like the Special Police Commandos, which have been closely linked with death squads and militias, operate with embedded US special forces trainers at the battalion level (ie about the ratio of teacher to student in most class rooms), who live, work, patrol and sleep with the units. It is therefore entirely appropriate to focus on the intellectual authorship of this genocidal campaign of murder at its **highest level** in order to seek ways to prevent further crimes and prosecute those responsible. One such way would be to press for an independent international investigation by an agency such as the UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions. Such an investigation must not be charged with examining **specific** organizations; it must be charged with **investigating** the thousands of extrajudicial killings taking place across Iraq and determining responsibility, wherever it may lie. This is in no way an alternative to ending the occupation, but is an integral part of campaigning to uncover the crimes of the occupiers, end the

occupation and act in solidarity with Iraqis facing terrible persecution. It is in just this spirit that Dennis Kucinich [wrote an open letter](#) to Donald Rumsfeld, exposing the complicity of the US war machine, not in defending Muqtada al-Sadr or the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq.

As I wrote at the beginning of this article, it took years of agony to finally uncover a tiny fraction of the true extent of US complicity in El Salvador's killing fields. Soldiers tormented with guilt finally had the [courage to come forward](#) at the risk of their own lives to reveal their roles in collecting information through savage torture and murder, information that was laid on the adjacent desks of US intelligence operatives, minus only the gory details of how it had been obtained. The value of such testimonies is in revealing the structure and logic of US counterinsurgency wars, so that their lessons never are forgotten.

Iraq's 'democratic opening' was just as vital a fig leaf for all-out dirty war as Duarte's civilian presidency was in El Salvador. At this moment all of the voices are telling us the same thing and that is that US-trained, armed and backed forces are committing yet another genocide. Islamofascism is just another cover for ruthless political, economic and social repression, with Shiite militiamen in Iraq no more needing to take their orders from Tehran than Guatemalan death squads needed to take theirs from the Vatican. The objective is not a mystery. It is total neo-colonial domination. Let's focus on what is concrete and start looking for ways to protect Iraqis from the wolves and wolf brigades that Anglo-American imperialism has unleashed on them. Focusing on the Mehdi Army or the Badr Brigades is exactly what the Occupation wants the anti-war movement to do, providing the real criminals with 'plausible denial' and building a climate in which Iraq can be successfully dismembered.

The Assault on Adhamiya - Not Civil War Yet

After numerous reports of fighting in the Adhamiya district of Baghdad over the last few months, many of them drawing on first-hand testimonies, it would probably surprise few of those who have paid attention to descriptions of Sunni vs Shia warfare, that the area is Tiger Brigade territory.

What might come as slightly surprising is to learn that the Tiger Brigade is not the feared Shiite predator, against whom residents of the predominantly Sunni district have thrown up barricades and formed neighbourhood self-defence groups. Instead, the [Tiger Brigade is the 2nd Brigade of the 6th Iraqi Army Division](#) (erroneously referred to in most reports as National Guard), [headquartered at the old Defence Ministry building](#), based in al Thawra (Sadr City) and [responsible for a large swathe of Baghdad east of the Tigris](#), including al-Adhamiya.

The best known and [best reported](#) part of the ongoing battle for Adhamiya took place on the nights of 17 and 18 April 2006, when gunmen stormed the neighborhood and were resisted by local forces. What role did Tiger play? According to one local 'the National Guards that are usually patrolling the street

left'. Did they melt away out of fear of the gunmen? Did they secretly or openly sympathize with the gunmen's aims? Were they obeying arcane orders passed down from the Ministry of Interior (MOI) not to interfere with the raid? I suggest the answer is none of those, but that the troops of the 2nd Brigade did not disappear, but redeployed to the perimeter of a predefined area of operations as part of a diligently orchestrated assault ('cordon and search') of the district. In doing so, they would have been fulfilling a role that US trainers had devised for them, and, no doubt, the [Military Transition Team](#) (MiTT), the 506th Regimental Combat Team of the 101st Airborne Division under Lt Col Paul Finken, would have been on hand to ensure that the job was done properly.

From what we know of such planned raids, the actual forces that enter the area of operations are usually paramilitary units of the Special (now National) Police, formerly made up of Police Commandos and Public Order Brigades, now simply consisting of two divisions with around eight individual brigades. This seems to be essentially consistent with what happened on the night of 17 April, with first-hand accounts stating that the intruders were special police forces from MOI. Nothing so far is out of step with what we should expect from a carefully planned counterinsurgency operation (eg see the [account of Operation Knockout](#)).

Where doubt about the identity of the attackers and intellectual authorship of the assault starts to creep in is with the eyewitnesses who made the following statements (see '[The assault on Adhamiya: Limitations and perspectives of war reporting from Iraq](#)' and '[Baghdad Slipping into Civil War](#)').

'Shia attacked a Sunni mosque'

'Special forces from the Ministry of Interior, probably Badr brigades'

'these were members of the Badr militia and Sadr's Mehdi Army who were raiding the neighborhood'

'I have seen these members of the Badr militia and Mehdi Army wearing Iraqi Police uniforms and using Iraqi Police pick-up trucks roaming our streets'

'Some were just wearing civilian clothes with black face masks, others were definitely commandos from the ministry of the interior'

Such statements deserve neither to be dismissed, nor patronised, but they do need to be questioned.

What seems clear is that many of the intruders were indeed MOI Special/National Police units and that the description of them as either Badr or Mehdi militiamen, though undoubtedly believed, relies solely on the **assumption** that such forces have been thoroughly infiltrated by these two Shiite militias. This simply is not true, certainly to any practical effect, as a wealth of evidence demonstrates (for instance, Major General Rick Lynch, who headed the training mission for the Public Order Division, [highlights the mixed ethno-sectarian make-up](#) of the Special/National Police).

More challenging are the accounts of un-uniformed attackers in balaclavas. Could these not be Shiite militiamen loyal to Badr of Mehdi working alongside MOI forces? I believe not. Firstly because we know from a June 2004 UPI account of a raid in Baghdad (now mysteriously removed from the Internet and only currently available [here](#)) that plainclothes intelligence officers accompany MOI operations.

Secondly because, despite the initial absence of US ground forces, we can be confident that the raid had been coordinated with Multi National Force-Iraq, ie the Occupation. For instance, several witnesses reported the presence of helicopters overhead, while others mentioned that US soldiers joined the attackers subsequent to the initial incursion – these soldiers almost certainly constituted the Quick Reaction Force (QRF) that [US Army spokesman Rick Lynch told journalists](#) was dispatched (ie a planned operation was not going according to plan). That US forces were not present from the outset is not surprising. This is exactly what the US has been wanting to achieve and Lynch boasts that 60% of patrols are now conducted by Iraqi forces (op cit.). In fact, as independent journalist [Dahr Jamail rightly points out](#), the new US *modus operandi* sounds disturbingly similar (if not identical) to what just occurred in Adhamiya.

‘Iraqi forces would take the lead, supported by American air power, special operations, intelligence, embedded officers and back-up troops. Helicopters suitable for urban warfare, such as the manoeuvrable AH-6 ‘Little Birds’ ... are likely to complement ground attacks.’

So if ‘militiamen’ were present, we absolutely have to assume that they were under US oversight, making any accusations against Badr or Mahdi irrelevant.

Dude, where’s my civil war?

With the greatest possible respect to the Iraqis living and dying through this Occupation-imposed nightmare and to the commentators who are understandably confused by the inherent duplicity of ‘dirty wars’, it must be emphasized that it does no favors to the Iraqis to overblow the supposed sectarian dimension of the ongoing conflict.

In fact, one of the most revealing aspects of the Adhamiya battle is that it is most definitely not Sunni vs Shia. We know that the US proxy forces are not exclusively Shiite, despite popular misconceptions. It should also not be forgotten that the ‘predominantly Sunni area of Adhamiya’ is, de facto, mixed! Of all the unlikely sources, it is the [New York Times that reveals](#) that on one block in Adhamiya, Sunnis and Shiites stood guard on rooftops and at street corners **together**. This shouldn’t really surprise us. The residents of Adhamiya and Kadhamiya, a predominantly Shiite district, [got together to send relief](#) to the residents of Fallujah during the US siege. It took the destruction of the bridge linking the two communities and the imposition of roadblocks to start breaking down that sense of solidarity.

Undoubtedly, the unity of Iraq is under desperate threat and the actions of the Occupation are producing extraordinary tensions. That is by design. Nevertheless, the closest thing to a civil war in Adhamiya is that ordinary Iraqis are attempting to protect themselves from the ravages of Iraqi mercenaries fighting for the Occupation. That some Iraqis, at the sharpest end of violence, propaganda and active disinformation campaigns (psyops), are started to falter in their belief in a shared destiny for all Iraqis is hardly surprising. It is the duty of the anti-war movement to listen to them, but it is not our duty to follow them when they are deceived down blind alleys. It is also our duty to understand what is going on to the best of our ability and to try to find ways of building active solidarity with all sectors of Iraqi society in struggle.

Max Fuller (*July 2006*)

Max Fuller has worked for some years as a member of the Colombia Solidarity Campaign in the UK and has read extensively on US policy and Latin America. He is the author of several reports published in the 'Bulletin of the Colombia Solidarity Campaign'. Max Fuller is the author of 'For Iraq, the Salvador Option Becomes Reality' and 'Crying Wolf: Media Disinformation and Death Squads in Occupied Iraq', both published by the Centre for Research on Globalisation. He is a member of the BRussells Tribunal Advisory Committee where he has published several articles: Conflicting Media Accounts: Evidence of Iraqi Death Squad Conspiracy and Diyala - A Laboratory of Civil War? He is an authority in the field of "Death Squads" and "the Salvador Option". He can be contacted via the website www.cryingwolf.deconstructingiraq.org.uk

PUBLIC STATEMENT

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JIHAD KILLINGS IN BAGHDAD REQUIRE IMMEDIATE UN INVESTIGATION

The Massacre in al Jihad

On Sunday 9 July 2006 several carloads of masked gunmen entered the Jihad district of western Baghdad from the main road to Baghdad International Airport (BIA) ([Associated Press](#)), where they commenced to kill at least 40 people.

The masked gunmen set up fake **police checkpoints** ([BBC](#)), where they proceeded to stop cars and demanded to see passengers' identification cards ([AP](#), [BBC](#))

The masked gunmen pulled drivers from their cars ([BBC](#)). It is **presumed** that they were looking for Sunni names ([AP](#) via ABC).

The gunmen roamed the neighbourhood ([AP](#)) and entered some houses ([BBC](#)).

The slaughter lasted several hours, according to Alaa Makki, a spokesman for the Iraqi Islamic party ([Guardian](#)).

US and Iraqi security forces sealed off the area ([AP](#), [BBC](#)).

A spokesman for a Sunni clerical association, Mohammed Beshar al-Faydhi, blamed the attack on the Mehdi Army, associated with Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr ([AP](#)).

Al-Sadr denies responsibility and has called for Sunnis and Shiites to join hands ([AP](#)).

Iraq's Deputy Prime Minister, Salam al-Zubaie, **blamed Iraqi security forces for the attack**. ([AP](#)).

The Prime Minister's office claimed al-Zubaie's statements did not represent the government's official position ([AP](#)).

Unanswered Questions

A key issue that has not so far been addressed is how several carloads of masked gunmen were able to move along the main road to Baghdad International Airport to commit massacres over the course of hours - described by the BBC's Jonny Dymond as 'breathtaking'- in an area adjacent to the road, without being intercepted.

Route Irish

As every journalist familiar with Baghdad undoubtedly knows, the main road between Baghdad International Airport and the Green Zone, code named Route Irish, is one of the most heavily militarised zones in Baghdad.

Route Irish -- the military name for the infamous road leading to Baghdad International Airport and a northern boundary line for 2-6's territory -- has grown more secure in past months, a feat accomplished mainly through a significant increase in soldiers. The last roughly 3-mile stretch of the road has up to 500 Iraqi police officers present at any time. About 150 of them are on duty at checkpoints along the road, Smith said. In addition, U.S. forces also keep a regular patrol schedule on the road. [Kimberly Johnson, USA Today, 5 July 2006](#)

The road [Route Irish] is heavily patrolled, both on the ground, and in the air with UAVs and helicopters. As a result, terrorists have to go to extraordinary lengths just to plant a roadside bomb on Route Irish. Terrorists have largely given up trying to sneak out at night to plant a roadside bomb on Route Irish, as they continue to do on thousands of kilometers of less heavily patrolled roads. [James Dunnigan, Strategypage, 6 June 2005](#)

Two major US military bases lie at either end of Route Irish (see map), Camp Victory close to the airport, occupying the sprawling Abu Ghraib Palace complex, and Camp Prosperity in the al-Salam

Palace just before the Green Zone.

Both camps are within a few kilometers of the Jihad district, connected by a fast, multilane expressway.

Camp Victory is the nerve cell for Multi National Force-Iraq, containing underground intelligence bunkers and specialist surveillance units.

Both camps contain US military Quick Reaction Forces (Victory, Prosperity), capable of responding within 15 minutes.

The Jihad district lies within the area of responsibility of the 2nd Battalion of the 6th Infantry Regiment, whose important northern perimeter is Route Irish.

Failure to Intervene

It is impossible to believe that large groups of gunmen belonging to unsanctioned militias could have made their way to the Jihad district by way of Route Irish and conducted static paramilitary operations without attracting attention. It is equally impossible to believe that US forces were unable to take any more-effective action than sealing the area after the massacre.

In view of the allegations that Ministry of Interior security forces were involved in the incident and the fact that US forces failed to take effective action to prevent an attack within minutes' drive of two major US army bases, it is stressed that **there must be an independent international enquiry into the attack of 9 July 2006 in the Jihad district and into the ongoing wave of violence linked to Iraq's security forces.**

It is not acceptable to make vague accusations about Shiite militiamen infiltrating security forces that have been trained and armed, and continue to be nurtured, by Multi National Force-Iraq.

Nor is it acceptable for the governments of those countries that set this genocide in motion to wash their hands of responsibility for the events now taking place before our eyes.

Action must be urgently taken to find out who is responsible for this and other 'death squad' style killings, bring the perpetrators to justice and halt the wave of murder unleashed by the Invasion and Occupation of Iraq. It is not too late to prevent a civil war taking place in Iraq.

Balad Massacre once again demonstrates US orchestrated genocide

(**Max Fuller**, member of the **BRussells** Tribunal Advisory Committee, 09 November 2006)

All truth is safe and nothing else is safe, but he who keeps back truth, or withholds it from men, from motives of expediency, is either a coward or a criminal.

Max Fuller, 19th century philosopher

The tragic events that unfolded in Balad over the weekend of 13-14 October, in which around 60 residents lost their lives, have once again been portrayed as an example of inter-communal sectarian violence. In reality, as in every other reported instance, they prove that Iraq's US-trained, equipped and supported forces are responsible for the flood of killings attributed to Shiite death squads.

Untangling events

According to US military spokesmen, and reiterated in mainstream media outlets, the cycle of violence in Balad began on Friday 13 October, when insurgents murdered 17 farm labourers in the vicinity of Duluiyah.

The labourers are reported to have been Shiites and the killings have consequently been labelled as sectarian murders by Sunni insurgents.

Seldom picked up in the press is the fact that in relation to these killings, two local police officers have been arrested.

On the same day (Friday 13 October), according to [Major General William Caldwell](#), spokesman for Multinational Force-Iraq, a small Quick Reaction Force (QRF) was dispatched to Balad, some 5 miles from Duluiyah, based on unconfirmed reports that some Iraqis had been murdered.

The QRF made contact with unspecified local security forces to offer military assistance. Caldwell did not clarify why the US army considered that Iraqi security forces might need assistance in Balad on 13 October. The likeliest explanation is that MNF-I was aware that a major security operation was about to commence in Balad. Caldwell states that local authorities did not want any additional ground support, but requested overhead assets (helicopters presumably) and intelligence-collecting assets, which were made available. Once again, the presence of such assets indicates that a security operation was underway. From that point on, an unknown number of US forces (Caldwell suggests a platoon) continued patrolling actively in Balad.

According to media reports the violence in Balad began the following day, Saturday 14 October. Whilst many resident undoubtedly hold militias responsible, eyewitnesses are quite clear that units of the National Police assisted Shiite elements in their attacks on Sunnis. Again, this is what we would expect from a government-sponsored operation.

Was the Mahdi Army present?

According to Ellen Knickmeyer of the [Washington Post](#), citing a local Shiite cleric, frightened Shiite elders contacted the office of Moqtada al-Sadr in Kadhimiyah on 13 October.

In response, Mahdi fighters in plain clothes allegedly crowded into two buses and headed for Balad, followed by more Mahdi fighters in army uniforms and vehicles, as well as others in the uniform of Interior Ministry commandos (National Police units). These various elements assembled in Balad on the morning of 14 October and commenced to take control of Balad's streets, setting up checkpoints to control motor traffic.

By Tuesday (some 3 days later), the head of Balad city council, Malik Laftah, [claimed](#) that 'the Mahdi Army is controlling the town'.

But according to US and Iraqi government officials, it was government forces that were in control of Balad on Tuesday.

In fact, the three Mahdi elements that a spokesman described as heading to Balad to exact revenge are exactly the same three elements of the Iraqi state security forces that are present at every other government-sponsored cordon and search operation: army (normally holding the perimeter), police commandos (National Police) manning checkpoints and conducting house to house raids, plainclothes intelligence officers accompanying commandos*. It may be that additional irregular 'militia' elements were also involved, but the context remains categorically a security forces operation.

Interestingly, Ellen Knickmeyer wrote that the US QRF did not arrive in Balad until the end of 14 October (even this would leave glaring questions about the total failure to take any form of preventative or remedial action), but General Caldwell was very clear on this point:

We in fact did hear about the incident that did occur on the 13th there. We did despatch, based on the reports that occurred, a quick reaction force into the city to link up with and assist the local Iraqi security forces that were present at that time ... the first QRF force went into the city on the 13th.

General Caldwell also stated that if coalition (occupation) forces discovered persons or groups of persons operating outside the law, they would 'target' such persons or groups, 'irrespective of who they may or may not attribute some sort of membership to'. Should we assume that the US QRF and aerial surveillance assets simply missed the presence of the Mahdi Army (an illegal militia), who had set up roadblocks and taken control of the city, or must we conclude that the forces present in Balad were Iraqi state forces?

Two further pieces of circumstantial evidence support such a conclusion.

Firstly, some of the bodies that were eventually received at the Balad morgue bore electric drill holes, indicating that the victims had been detained against their will prior to death, ie had been arrested and taken to a detention facility where they were tortured. This is consistent with one detailed account, in

which a woman described how she and her husband were stopped at a checkpoint while attempting to flee the town. A hooded man identified her husband as a former army colonel; he was then beaten and taken away in a white sport-utility vehicle (ie a police vehicle) before being killed. These details are consistent with every other account of extrajudicial killings carried out by Interior Ministry personnel.

Secondly, the Kadhimiya district, where frightened Shiite elders looked for support, is not only home to an important Shiite shrine, but to one of the [most important military/police bases](#) (previously Camp Justice) in Baghdad, situated in a former intelligence facility. The base serves as the headquarters for one of the National Police divisions, formerly the Public Order Division. The National Police were expressly designed to be able to provide a strike force capability to the Interior Ministry, able to quickly deploy around the country to bolster local forces, in contrast to the Mahdi Army, which enjoys no formal backing, training or logistics and would be completely unable to deploy at short notice or to establish control over a large urban settlement.

Ultimately, it is the attested presence of US forces that demonstrates that this was a coordinated government operation and had nothing to do with any unauthorised militias.

Ghosts of Jadiriyah.

A survivor's testimony

One year after its discovery, the Baghdad detention facility synonymous with torture, clings onto secrets that could hold keys to Iraq's sectarian violence

Max Fuller, member of the BRussells Tribunal Advisory Committee.

(14 November 2006)

* [Articles](#) by the same author

* [Read also: *Testimony of Abbas Abid on torture in Al Jadiriyah* \(Kuala Lumpur 07 Feb 2007\)](#)

* [Read also: *The Silence of the Lambs? A Cry to Raise Our Voices! Proof of US orchestration of Death Squads Killings in Iraq* \(09 March 2007\) - Testimony of Iraqi torture victim confirms the presence of US personnel at the infamous Jadiriyah bunker](#)

*This article is partially based on an exclusive interview, conducted by Max Fuller on 7 October 2006 with **Professor Tareq Sammaree**, one of the survivors of the Jadiriyah detention facility.*

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The Testimony

‘Go, go! Don’t look back!’ It was with these words that a US soldier known only by the name Jackson emblazoned on his uniform bade farewell to Tareq Sammaree and two companions, the men that he had rescued from the Jadiriyah detention facility in Baghdad, which since its discovery on 13 November 2005 had become a virtual byword for medieval torture chamber.

Just three days previously, Jackson and the other soldiers from US Army’s Third Infantry Division must have seemed like angels to the 170 or so detainees that they rescued from the bunker in Eastern Baghdad. Tareq Sammarree, a 55-year-old professor from Baghdad University who was unable to walk after his spell in the facility, and some nine others in serious condition were rapidly evacuated to a nearby hospital.

After eight months of incarceration and around a dozen sessions of interrogation, Tareq’s injuries had mounted. Two of his upper teeth had been knocked out, three of his toenails had been extracted, his left shin was scarred from the application of a hot skewer, he had lost sensation in his left leg and his spine had been damaged from blows with an electric cable. In addition, he had been stripped naked and left bound at night in a blackened corridor under threat of rape and his jailers had informed him that they were holding his daughters and would rape them if Tareq refused to talk.

But, despite the terror, the violence and the physical mutilation Tareq never did tell his abusers what they wanted. Not because he did not know, but because he believed that the moment they were satisfied with the information would be the moment he joined the ever-increasing statistics of the thousands of tortured victims who find their way to the Baghdad Morgue. In the face of unbridled savagery, this distinguished scholar held onto life, held onto hope, thinking of his family. In the cell that he shared, he memorized the messages scrawled by former detainees: pleas for any who might be released to take word of their whereabouts to their own families. Other inmates were less able to cope with the ordeal. Tareq and his cell mates all had panic attacks when they heard the screams of other detainees being tortured in the distance, but for one 16-year-old student from Mosul it was devastating: ‘the young boy was in a situation. He didn’t even speak. He was tortured very badly and psychologically he was ruined.’

The discovery of the Jadiriyah facility sent shockwaves around the world, hitting the headlines of every international media outlet. The story encapsulated the situation in Iraq as many either saw or wanted to see it: US soldiers rescue abused Iraqis in their struggle to counter Iraq’s sectarian feuding. Tareq and the other detainees might have been expected to receive instant attention from the Iraqi

government, from US authorities in Iraq, civilian and military, and from human rights groups, as well as the press. Instead, after just three days in the hospital, soldier Jackson hurried Tareq and two companions to an unguarded exit and told them to run for their lives. The three men took his advice and after reuniting with his family, Tareq found a smuggler willing to risk transporting him and his family across the border to Syria for around US\$20,000. Months later, Tareq made his way by ship to Europe, where he is currently claiming political asylum. Understandably, Tareq's first priority now is to bring his family out of danger.

Tareq was neither a terrorist nor an 'insurgent'. In fact, he was among the most senior academics in Iraq prior to the US-lead invasion and, as Professor of Pedagogy at Baghdad University, he was a teacher of teachers, as well as a senior consultant within the Directorate of Education. Tareq had gained his masters degree at Stuttgart and his doctorate at Kansas University as part of a national training program in the early 1980s. He was one of around 5,000 men and women sent to universities in Britain, the USA and the USSR to build a core of academics intended to be the future leaders of Iraq. In America, Tareq was offered a generous package, including a house and car, to remain within US academia, but, unlike a handful of his peers, he returned to Iraq, determined to put his knowledge to use in his own country.

Tareq's crime was to have been a longstanding member of the Baath Party, which he joined in 1966 and for whose goal of a unified, democratic, socialist Arab nation he remains unashamed. And it was primarily to reveal the locations of other members of the Baath Party, especially academics, and their families, that he was repeatedly tortured.

Nation of Fear

In the climate of chaos and fear following the US invasion, Tareq rapidly lost his job. Iraq's academics did not see themselves as enemy combatants and the day after the fall of Baghdad Tareq and other senior members of staff returned to the university. What they found was US soldiers, anti-Baathist slogans and un-uniformed gunmen with pickup trucks on the prowl for academics who had been members of the Baath Party. A plethora of mass-produced posters spread around the campus carried images of Shiite clerics linked with the Daawa Party and the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. A week later, when payday arrived, Tareq was warned not to come into the university to collect his salary, as his name had appeared fourth on a public list of Baathists within the university.

On 22 April, less than two weeks after the fall of Baghdad a meeting was held at the university to discuss a new curriculum and a new academic structure. Everyone was going to have to reapply for their jobs, but those like Tareq who had been members of the Baath were to be excluded. The atmosphere at the meeting was extremely intimidating despite the presence of US soldiers, with the names of Baathists publicly displayed on a screen. Eventually, Tareq and a colleague decided it would be prudent to leave the meeting, only to find that their cars had been torched in the car park.

At this point, Tareq withdrew his children from school and moved into his brother's house in

Yarmouk. On 27 July his friend and colleague, Muhammed al-Rawi, president of Baghdad University, was [assassinated](#) in his clinic. Within days Tareq fled Baghdad with his wife (also an academic) and children.

For the next year and a half the family lived in hiding at a family farm outside the town of Dulluaia, not far from Samarra. Every 10 days or so Tareq made a trip into Samarra to sell produce and collect medication for his eldest son, who is asthmatic. At 8pm on 3 March 2005 the door of Tareq's uncle's house in Samarra, where Tareq and his son were staying, was broken down. Ten masked men claiming to be from the government in three Toyota Land Cruisers had come to take Tareq away. When his son tried to intervene, he too was seized. No warrant was produced and Tareq had no recourse to any form of judicial process. Father and son were handcuffed, blindfolded and driven away to an unknown destination. Hours later they were separated. Tareq has not seen his son since and has no idea what has become of him. Jackson and the US soldiers were unable to help.

What might have prevented Tareq from being returned to Iraqi captivity, as other Jadiriyah detainees were, is the fact that his other son lives and works in California as a plastic surgeon. After three days in the hospital seven of the 10 detainees were sent back to prison, while Tareq and two others remained due to their more serious conditions. One of them was Dr Mukalid al Mukhtar, a famous artist who was very seriously malnourished; the second was Dr Muhhamed Abdul All, the former president of Basra University, who had been badly injured with an electric drill applied to his head. When Dr Mukalid realised they would be sent back, he became frantic, insisting that he would rather die. It was at this point that Tareq entreated Jackson for help, passing on his son's telephone number in the US. The call that Jackson made to confirm the story may well have saved Tareq and his companions' lives.

DeBaathification

For many, Tareq's terrible story only further epitomises the collapse of Iraqi society, the rise of vengeful Shiite militias with links to Iran and the ultimate failure of US policy, dramatically underscored by Jackson's powerlessness to do more than assist Tareq's escape. But the reality may be much more sinister than that.

Tareq is amongst many former members of the Baath Party to be illegally detained or assassinated. Those murdered include academics, teachers, lawyers, doctors, as well as former members of the armed forces. The pattern was recognised as early as the end of 2003, when the [Washington Post](#) (20 December 2003) was able to report that over the last few months of that year, around 50 former senior security officials had been gunned down, while the death toll among neighbourhood officials across Baghdad was even higher. In Sadr City the death rate in December was as much as one or two per day. According to both the *Post* and [Knight Ridder](#) (22 December 2003), local police officers described some of these killings as 'absolutely organised' and 'meticulously planned', with one stating that the killers had 'specific knowledge of the targets' homes and usual driving routes'. Some claimed the targets were picked from widely disseminated lists that had been compiled by the Badr Organisation, the armed wing of the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq. In February 2004, the Deputy

Interior Minister, General Ahmad Katham Ibrahim, [claimed](#) the killings of academics were carried out by Baathists who feared that they would divulge information about weapons programmes. The charge was palpable nonsense given the range of disciplines from which the victims came and demonstrated the contempt with which the Interior Ministry held them.

Incredibly, it seems that no one ever drew the connection with a 15 December 2003 article in the [New Yorker](#) by veteran journalist Seymour Hersh. In it, Hersh, citing anonymous officials, claimed the Bush administration was planning to stand up a special forces group (Task Force 121), whose highest priority would be the 'neutralisation' of Baathist 'insurgents' by capture or assassination, specifically targeting what was referred to as the 'broad middle' of the Baathist underground.

At about the same time the [Washington Post](#) (5 November 2003) announced that US proconsul Paul Bremmer had agreed with the Iraqi Governing Council to the establishment of an 800-strong Iraqi paramilitary unit, whose operatives were to be drawn from former security forces personnel and members of the armed wings of the five main opposition (exile) parties. The force was to include a domestic intelligence-gathering arm. The unit, which at the time would have been the most powerful force under Interior Ministry command, would work side by side with US special forces and be overseen by US military commanders.

We know almost nothing definite about this force and its activities, yet in March 2004 the [Institute of War and Peace Reporting](#) (IWPR) revealed the existence of a militia organisation known as 'Black Flag', which was able to openly patrol on a main street in Baghdad's Adhamiya district. The group's banner incorporated the sword of Shiite founding saint Imam Ali, but, when interviewed, militiamen claimed the group's 5000 members included Sunni Arabs and Kurds. The group witnessed by IWPR had in its possession a list of 21 suspects, mostly belonging to two prominent Sunni tribes.

After this report, Black Flag more or less vanishes from the annals of contemporary Iraq, but it seems very likely that Black Flag was the cross-party paramilitary outfit brought into being by Paul Bremmer. Could this militia account for many of the claims of Shiite militiamen accompanying/conducting raids or should we think that the unit was eventually subsumed within the specialised paramilitary units of the Ministry of the Interior after the transfer of sovereignty?

These various forces were further supplemented, according to the [Washington Post](#) (3 August 2005) by teams of CIA-sponsored militia (paramilitaries) known as Scorpions, recruited from Iraqi exiles, who were employed immediately after the invasion to infiltrate resistance groups, to interrogate suspects and, from time to time, to do 'the dirty work', according to an anonymous intelligence official.

In Basra killings of former Baathists and government officials, including several teachers, [began](#) at the end of 2003 after the [establishment](#) of a new police intelligence unit, initially [called](#) the Special Operations Department. It was swiftly recognised by the [Sunday Times](#) (25 January 2004) that the killings emanated from the Special Operations Department, based at the Jamiyat police station, yet, according to the [New York Times](#) (22 May 2006), US intelligence officers continued to operate from

the Jamiyat, supplying 'tips', despite the fact information was being leaked to death squads. Amnesty International reported that many of the killings were of middle ranking Baathists, perhaps the 'broad middle' of a political party driven underground through fear.

One group that has particularly stood out in Basra is a party/militia known as Tha'r Allah, Vengeance of Allah, identified by the commentator [Juan Cole](#) as a branch of the Badr Organisation. According to [Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty](#) (RFERL), a group by that name first appeared in late 2003, when it was reported to have been operating in Baghdad, issuing a statement on 1 November in which it claimed that it was 'hunting down and killing supporters of the Saddam Hussein regime', specifically those who worked in security and intelligence. The group claimed its membership came from 'all the factions' of Iraqi people. [Associated French Press](#) (AFP) reported that a group by the same name appeared in Basra later the same month, where it was under the leadership of Yusuf al-Musawi, who at that time claimed al-Qaida was working with Hussein loyalists.

Evidence of Tha'r Allah's involvement with political assassinations was given to the [Times](#) (4 August 2005) in August 2005, which interviewed an eyewitness who claimed that Tha'r Allah had tried to assassinate his father, a former naval officer. When the family had fought Tha'r Allah off, they were arrested by the police and tortured for over a week. Such complicity must have at least been suspected in March 2004, when, according to the [Telegraph](#) (7 April 2004), following a clash between British forces and Tha'r Allah, the British apologised and returned Tha'r Allah's weapons.

In October 2005 the governor of Basra ordered a major raid on Tha'r Allah. According to a [statement](#) provided to the UN, police found around 50 people illegally detained, arrested a number of suspected members of death squads and found documentary evidence linking the party to Iranian intelligence. The Interior Ministry in Baghdad responded furiously, ordering the governor to release the suspected assassins, and the [New York Times](#) (22 May 2006) reported that in November a team, with US advisors was dispatched to shake up the Basra police. According to the testimony given to the UN, Yusuf al-Musawi works with police intelligence and is responsible for police vehicles. A January 2005 article in the [Iraqi Al-Sabah](#) newspaper (16 January 2005), stated that Yusuf al-Musawi, who is the head of the higher supervisory commission of the Basra Council, was appointed as a supervisor for Basra's night time checkpoints, 'subordinating for Basra Police leadership'. No explanation has ever been offered for the special protection that this party linked to political killings has received.

Control of the Interior Ministry

The killings of Baathists began at a time when the US was in full control over the government and the Interior Ministry and had established a range of paramilitary outfits composed, at least in part, of the very people who were popularly believed to be behind the killings and whose tasks, we must suspect, included the 'neutralisation' of the 'broad middle' of the Baathist underground.

After the formation of the transitional government under Ibrahim Jafari in the Spring of 2005 it was widely reported that the Interior Ministry has fallen under the control of the Badr Organisation, with persistent emphasis placed on the role of Bayan Jabr, a former Badr commander, who had been

appointed Interior Minister. The seemingly inescapable conclusion was that paramilitary police operations launched from the Ministry had a sectarian, even pro-Iranian, bias. What has been much less often reported is that the top floor of the Interior Ministry remains in US hands according to the [Los Angeles Times](#) (9 July 2006), that uniformed and un-uniformed US personnel ‘are an obtrusive presence’ at the Adnan Palace where Jabr himself was based according to the [New York Times](#) (14 December 2005) and that Multinational Force-Iraq maintains a cell within the National Command Centre of the Interior Ministry according to the November-December issue of [Military Review](#). To this list of caveats, we may add the fact that the [head of all Interior Ministry forces](#) remains a Sunni former Baathist general and CIA conspirator.

In the case of the Jadiriyah complex we know that the facility was strongly linked with the new intelligence apparatus. According to the previous Interior Minister, Falah al Naqib, quoted in the [New York Times](#) (17 November 2005), the facility had originally served as the Interior Ministry headquarters. A month after the transfer of sovereignty, the headquarters was moved, but the minister maintained an office on the first floor and senior ministry officials continued to work from this ‘major operations center’.

After the discovery of the complex, it was quickly [reported](#) that the basement was being used by a police intelligence outfit referred to as the Special Investigations Unit. [The Los Angeles Times](#) (29 November 2005) subsequently claimed the detention centre had been run by an Iraqi colonel, who may be the senior interrogator identified by Tareq Sammaree as Abu Ali. According to anonymous US and Iraqi sources, the colonel and the Special Investigations Unit were affiliated with the Badr Brigade. No concrete evidence has been put forward to support this claim, but Dr Sammaree believes that Hadi al-Amery, the head of the Badr Organisation, was present during one of his interrogations.

In response to questions regarding Badr involvement, Hussein Kamal, the directory of intelligence at the Ministry of the Interior as well as a Sunni Kurd, [stated](#) that he did not know whether the Special Investigations Unit was staffed by members of Badr. He did, however, say that all of the detainees had been arrested under judicial warrant. Whether that is or is not true (no such warrant was ever shown to Tareq; however, according to the head of Iraq’s central criminal court, certain Interior Ministry units can make arrests without judicial warrant, effectively sanctioning what would otherwise be extrajudicial detention), Kamal’s assertion strongly implies that this US appointee did not regard the detention facility as in any way illicit, although he balked at the evidence of torture. An eighteen-year-old guard in a special-forces uniform [interviewed](#) by Reuters at the complex claimed that detainees were arrested for criminal activity without regard to sect or ethnicity. For his part, Hadi al-Amery [issued a statement](#) that it is the Ministry of the Interior, not Badr, that runs the detention facility and that Americans were there every day.

While we should entertain strong reservations about Mr Amery and his organisation, his statement rings essentially true. It is quite clear that the Jadiriyah complex was an Interior Ministry facility and, taken with Kamal’s comments, it would be sensible to assume that, whatever else they were, the Special Investigations Unit was staffed by Interior Ministry employees. That US operatives worked in

the building on a daily basis is also extremely likely given the US presence at other Interior Ministry sites, and even the [BBC](#) concedes that ‘The Americans must clearly have been aware of the overall situation at the interior ministry as well as of the specific accusations being made’ (16 November 2005).

It is not hard to reconcile the different accounts of who was running the Jadiriyah complex, bearing in mind the formation of paramilitary units from militia personnel and, as we shall come to, the creation of a new intelligence apparatus from the same source. It is therefore perfectly possible that intelligence officers have been or continue to be Badr members, including, perhaps, Hadi al-Amery himself.

The importance of the discovery of the Jadiriyah facility is that for a few short days of media attention it provided a window into the murky world of Iraq’s new Interior Ministry. The Jadiriyah bunker was not simply an Iraqi detention facility where abuse took place; it was a way point in a para-legal process whose end product is, in many cases, extrajudicial killing. Rapidly after their rescue, a group of the detainees [compiled a list](#) of 18 former prisoners who they claimed had been killed. The list was authenticated by US officials, but no follow-up has been forthcoming. Dr Sammaree endured under the conviction that he too would be killed and he knows that the corpses of several of those interred with him have subsequently been found, including the imam of the Omar bin al Khatab Mosque in Baghdad as well as another academic, Dr Kadim Mashoot, who had been with Dr Sammaree in the hospital before being returned to Iraqi custody.

Intelligence-based counterinsurgency

The relevant issue is not whether there are Badr members in the security forces, especially the intelligence apparatus, but from where they take their direction and to what purpose. In attempting to answer what is obviously an extremely complex and controversial question, it is important to bear two vital points in mind. Firstly, we must remember that the majority of the thousands of so-called sectarian killings taking place across Baghdad and the rest of Iraq every month appear to have been carried out in detention by members of the security forces *in whatever capacity they are acting*. This can be concluded for several reasons. Most importantly, we are told that the majority of the victims of ‘death squads’ are characterised by having their hands bound or cuffed, by being blindfolded and by bearing signs of severe torture. Not only are these indicators consistent with numerous accounts of arrest and detention, but they demonstrate that the victims had been detained against their will prior to death. We know of no other system capable of mass detention than [the plethora of secret facilities](#), such as the Jadiriyah bunker, operated by the Ministry of the Interior. On top of this there are numerous eyewitness accounts of arrest by Interior Ministry special forces leading to extrajudicial killing. And this picture is further reinforced by statistics compiled by the [Iraqi Organisation for Follow-up and Monitoring](#) in Iraq, which reports that in 92% of some 3498 cases of extrajudicial killing that they examined, the victims had been arrested by Interior Ministry forces, as well as by the former United Nations human rights chief John Pace, who told the [Independent](#) in February 2006 (26 February 2006) that the majority of killings were being carried out by groups under the control of the Interior Ministry.

The second point that we must remember is that the US is conducting what is technically known as intelligence-based counterinsurgency operations in Iraq. What that means is that US soldiers and their Iraqi allies don't just sit on street corners waiting for suspicious-looking passers by; it means that intelligence operatives systematically set about acquiring information about suspected 'insurgents' and building up detailed profiles from which specialist counterinsurgency forces can make arrests.

The ability to compile data is critical to US counterinsurgency missions. In the case of El Salvador, the March-April 2004 issue of [Military Review](#) boasts of how US military personnel ran a horrific civil war that claimed tens of thousands of innocent lives, not only by training elite hunter-killer units, placing personnel in key positions within the Salvadoran command structure, but by providing the target folder packages that the Salvadoran intelligence apparatus was to use to build its lists of 'subversives'. For Iraq we have a [statement of work](#) for the new intelligence apparatus detailing the creation of nationwide intelligence apparatus, including the numbers of cars and workstations to be provided for each office and, crucially, stressing the need for suitable database software to compile comprehensive lists of Iraqi suspects that could be overseen by coalition personnel.

In fact, we know that the entire Iraqi intelligence apparatus is a US creation. [Knight Ridder](#) (9 May 2005) reported that immediately after the invasion [given the obvious overlap between the Scorpions, CMAD and the paramilitary unit we may suspect that the whole process predated the invasion] the CIA took operatives from the militias of the six largest opposition (exile) parties, including Badr, which they welded into an organisation known as the Collection Management and Analysis Directorate (CMAD), whose task was 'turn raw data into targets'. This organisation was subsequently to form the nucleus for Iraq's new state intelligence apparatus, with branches in the interior and defence ministries and a special core of operative picked out to form a national intelligence agency. It is likely that these CMAD agents were joined by members of the former intelligence apparatus, teams of whom were quickly put to work penetrating the 'insurgency' according to [Seymour Hersh](#).

Knight Ridder also revealed that the CIA retained control of the intelligence apparatus after the transfer of sovereignty, which was a source of resentment for the government of Ibrahim Jaafari. The retention rankled so much with the Badr Organisation that Hadi al-Amery threatened that if the US did not hand it over, they would be forced to build an alternative structure. However, there is no evidence that such an alternative structure ever has been built and very little possibility that such an institution could exist side by side with the US-controlled state apparatus.

Many of the most senior appointments were not given to Badr people but to former military officers with whom the US had a history of cooperation, such as Gen. Hussain Ali Kamal, head of intelligence at the Interior Ministry, and Gen. Mohammed Abdullah Shahwani, the director of the national intelligence. Coordinating the whole edifice, the US placed [Mowaffak Rubaie](#), a senior Daawa activist who had lived in London since the 1980s where, as Mow Baker, he headed a medical recruitment agency and became the moderate face of an exiled terrorist organisation. All of these men have retained their positions despite the supposed ascendancy of Badr.

We can also conclude that a great deal of the so-called sectarian violence can be traced back to the paramilitary units created under US supervision after the transfer of sovereignty, which were specifically intended to give the Interior Ministry a strike-force capability. These units, which now number some 20,000 soldiers, have been variously known as special police commandos and public order brigades, but are now simply [designated as National Police](#). Their constituent units have borne such notorious names as the Wolf Brigade, the Volcano Brigade and the Scorpions [this unit is actually a [specialised SWAT force](#) and is probably not the same as the Scorpions mentioned above]. Despite frequent charges of Badr infiltration, the ranks of the National Police are ethnically and denominationally mixed according to [Colonel Gordon Davis](#), the head of the public order special police transition teams, and many recruits are said to have been drawn [from former special forces and Republican Guard units](#). Their most senior commanders have been former Baathists and, most importantly, they have trained and operated under the constant supervision of embedded US special forces trainers, known as special police transition teams.

In line with US plans, these paramilitary units have increasingly taken the lead in cordon and search operations, often being seen as representatives of the Shiite-heavy government, rather than as agents of a foreign occupation. The point was spelled out with great clarity in Diyala province with the November 2005 Operation Knockout. According to [UPI](#) (18 November 2005), this division-sized raid provoked outrage among local Sunni representatives on the provincial council, who saw in it the hand of the Badr Organisation. Behind the headlines, however, the raid was planned by a US-sponsored Interior Ministry with meticulous precision, as an account in [Military Review](#) (November-December 2005) demonstrates. Two months before the operation the intelligence section of the Operations Directorate began preparing a list of suspects based on intelligence gleaned from local informers; the intelligence section produced dossiers on individual suspects; one week before the operation the intelligence section passed the list of suspects to the Public Order Division commander; the Public Order Division prepared folders on the individual suspects, making use of an airborne mapping capability; before commencement of the operation, last minute visual checks were made of individual suspects. And all of this was carried out under the scrutiny of the US military, right down to battalion level.

Deconstructing Iraq

Perhaps the single biggest stumbling block to comprehending the violence beyond the sectarian framework that is so commonly presented is the difficulty of appreciating why and how such a policy could be carried out by the US. There are plenty of precedents for such campaigns of violence, notably in Indonesia after the Suharto take-over, in Vietnam under the auspices of the Phoenix Program and during the civil war in El Salvador in the 1980s, mentioned above. But there is also a structural logic revealed with surprising candor in US army counterinsurgency field manual [FMI 3-07.22](#). According to this 2004 publication, signals of increasing enemy activity include ‘increase in the number of entertainers with a political message’, ‘circulation of petitions advocating opposition or dissident demands’, ‘attempts to discredit or ridicule national or public officials’, distribution of clothing to underprivileged or minority classes by organisations of recent or suspect origin’, ‘agitation against

government plans or projects', 'unusual gatherings among the population', 'nationwide strikes', and 'student unrest'. In short, any sign of popular political activism or organisation is considered to be indicative of enemy action. What this suggests is that the object of counterinsurgency is suppression of political dissent by force, rather than achieving a monopoly on violence in order to allow the free functioning of society within a democratically chosen framework of rules. In the charged atmosphere of counterinsurgency warfare, it is not difficult to understand how those singled out for political divergence are turned into military targets. In the case of the Baath Party, adherence to its ideological programme (Arab unity and socialism) is likely to be sufficient to brand someone a subversive according to this paradigm, with many of Iraq's foremost professionals in every field falling de facto into the enemy camp, regardless of their actions, especially once, liked Tareq, they have been driven into hiding. In Iraq, senior Baathists are the political equivalents of the Communist cadres liquidated in other counterinsurgency campaigns.

In Iraq there is a second structural imperative for the violence, equally compelling, though much less candid. Despite public utterances, there is good reason to think that one of the goals of the US occupation has been the political dismemberment of the country. The notion of a federal structure had been agreed at the [London conference](#) before the invasion took place under the guiding hand of current US ambassador Zalmay Khalilzid. The idea has been repeatedly endorsed in the pages of the New York Times ([25 November 2003](#), [1 May 2006](#)) by president emeritus of the Council for Foreign Affairs, Leslie H Gelb, a guru of US imperial strategy. A [sectarian framework](#) was superimposed on the new Iraqi state from the outset of the occupation, with political representatives made to take their place within [government according to their language, religion, sect and ethnicity](#) rather than by political programmes. Most importantly, the US installed as National Security Advisor (probably the most senior Iraqi military post in the land) Mowaffak al-Rubaie, a [dedicated champion of partition](#), who has contemplated as many as six statelets within a loose federal structure. Now, with the [growing backing](#) of powerful political figures in the US such as leading Democrat foreign affairs spokesman Joseph R Biden Jr and the [de facto endorsement](#) of the outgoing British ambassador, the break-up of Iraq seems close at hand. With Iraq holding the second-largest proven oil reserves in the world, it's not hard to see why three fractionalized polities might appear a more desirable outcome than a strong, centralized Iraqi state.

An obvious question that remains is why, given the extent of US involvement with the Interior Ministry, did US soldiers conduct the 13 November raid on the Jadiriyah facility. The official story at the time was that US soldiers were investigating the disappearance of a 15-year-old [the boy was not discovered among the prisoners that were released; we still do not know what happened to him]. If this was the case, it would closely mirror an [incident](#) that took place in June 2004, immediately after the transfer of sovereignty to Iraq's interim government. In this instance, members of the Oregon National Guard witnessed serious abuse taking place within an Interior Ministry compound from a nearby observation post. The Oregon unit took quick and decisive action, invading the compound, disarming the abusers and administering emergency first aid to detainees, many of whom were in a life threatening condition. However, on this occasion, when the guardsmen called for support, they were ordered to stand down by senior US commanders.

In the Jadiriyah case, a variation on the prevailing narrative was offered by the [Independent](#) (16 November 2005), which stated that it was local Iraqi police forces that initially responded to allegations that missing persons were being held at the Interior Ministry facility, raising the possibility that senior US administrators might have felt that they had no choice than to intervene on their own terms.

Perhaps we will never know exactly how the discovery occurred. What mattered then and continues to matter now is that this, and cases like it, are thoroughly investigated. In response to the discovery of the Jadiriyah complex, the Iraqi government rapidly assured the world that a full investigation would be carried out within weeks. At the same time US officials promised that they would provide assistance, with [Brig. Gen. Karl Horst](#) promising a legal team to go through the detainees' files and a [US embassy spokesman](#) stating that Justice Department and FBI officers would provide technical assistance.

Such a government-lead investigation was far from the much-needed independent enquiry [advocated by Manfred Novak](#), the UN rapporteur for torture, and that was being [demonstrated for](#) by Iraqi organizations in Baghdad. Yet the findings of even that minimal enquiry have [failed, a year later, to materialise](#), despite repeated calls from the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq.

The latest figures released by the UN drawn from hospital and morgue statistics indicate that around 1500 Iraqis are dying in Baghdad alone each month. These are the victims of death squads that according to every piece of available evidence emanate from Iraq's new Ministry of the Interior. It is too late for the thousands of Iraqis who have been murdered since the discovery of the Jadiriyah torture chamber to know whether a full and open investigation might have lead to action that could have saved their lives, but it will never be too late to demand serious answers to the question of how a state security apparatus set up by British and US planners could appear to lie at the heart of one of the most violent civil conflicts in the world today. In countries like Chile where thousands were disappeared at the hands of US-backed security apparatuses, it would melt hearts of stone to hear a mother imploring only to know where her son's body had been interred so that she could place flowers on his grave 20 years after his disappearance. In Iraq we absolutely owe it to a population suffering beyond our comprehension to provide them with real investigations and real answers, not only to try to find ways to bring an end to the violence, but to bring closure, joyous or otherwise, to those, like Tareq, still waiting to discover the fates of their loved ones.

Action Needed Over Detention of Iraqi Education Ministry Officials

Unknown numbers murdered, dozen still illegally held

BRussells Tribunal press release 22 November 2006.

[For urgent release]

* About the campaign to save Iraq's academics.

Summary of Events

On Tuesday 14 November paramilitary gunmen in the uniforms of Iraqi National Police commandos raided a building belonging to the Ministry of Education in Baghdad's Karrada district and arrested around 100 members of staff from two departments and around 50 visitors, according to lists compiled by the Minister of Education.

The raid took place in broad daylight, 1km from the Green Zone, in an area that contained several high-security compounds, including the department where passports are issued. According to a [BBC correspondent](#) the Karrada area, occupying an isthmus in the River Tigris, is 'well protected with a heavy presence of Iraqi troops and several checkpoints'. The paramilitary force estimated at between at least 50 and 100 arrived in a fleet of some 20-30 camouflage pickup trucks of the kind employed by the Interior Ministry and rapidly established a cordon of the area. They stated that they were from an anti-corruption unit and were carrying out arrests ahead of a visit by the US ambassador. The paramilitaries made their arrests according to lists, confirming the identities of those present by their ID cards, then handcuffed and blindfolded the detainees and put them into the backs of pickups and into two larger vehicles.

The paramilitaries then made their exit through heavy traffic without opposition, despite the reported presence of a regular police vehicle. According to some witnesses, the paramilitaries made off in the direction of Sadr City.

The Iraqi government quickly declared that the number of detainees was far lower (18 guards, 16 members of staff and five visitors) and by Wednesday claimed that all of the detainees had been released after a series of dramatic police raids. A number of senior policemen, including the district police chief and the commander of a National Police paramilitary commando brigade and three other officers were reportedly detained for questioning over possible complicity. According to one report, an Interior Ministry spokesman claimed the senior police commanders 'should be held responsible'.

Prime Minister Maliki declared that this was not a case of terrorism, but a dispute between 'militias'.

The Education Ministry insisted that both Sunnis and Shiites were among those illegally detained.

US commanders stated that they would support all efforts to free the detainees.

By Thursday the Education Minister stated that around 70 of 150 detainees had been released and

reported that some of those released had been tortured (some legs and hands had been broken) and that there were allegations that others had been killed.

On Friday Mowaffak Rubiae, the National Security Advisor, stated that all of the detainees had been released, although an Interior Ministry spokesman claimed that all of the Education Ministry personnel had been released but some of the visitors detained were still missing.

One of the detainees, who refused to reveal his actual name, said that his arm had been broken while in detention. He also described seeing three security guards suffocated to death and hearing a number of senior academics who had been put in a separate screaming in agony; according to the witness their cries were cut off abruptly.

The witness also said that he had not been released as the result of a dramatic police raid. His captors had simply dragged him and others from the building where they were held, put them back into trucks and dumped them at various locations around Baghdad. His account is confirmed by earlier reports, which stated that those released had been blindfolded and deposited in various parts of Baghdad.

Five more detainees were reportedly released on Friday. They had been tortured.

On Saturday the Education Ministry continued to insist that 66 people were still missing.

The Interior Ministry spokesman said that all of the detainees had been released and the matter was now closed.

Joint US and Iraqi forces conducted a raid on a mosque in Sadr City on Saturday. None of the detainees were found.

On Sunday a further four detainees were released, who reported seeing one Ministry official, Hamid al-Jouani, killed.

On Monday joint US and Iraqi forces conducted another raid in Sadr City. None of the detainees were found.

Unanswered Questions

From the above description of events drawn from mainstream media sources (please see references at end) making use of government statements and eyewitness testimony it is clear that the raid on the Interior Ministry was carried out as a complex military operation requiring detailed intelligence, careful preparation and extensive training. In fact, everything about this raid conforms with what we should expect of an operation conducted by Iraq's new US-trained, armed and supported specialist counterinsurgency paramilitary National Police commandos, who are specifically trained to conduct cordon and search operations of this kind.

It is impossible to believe that any forces but officially sanctioned ones could have made such a daring

daylight assault in one of the most secure areas of Baghdad. It is equally impossible to believe that any forces but Interior Ministry ones could have assembled a fleet of Interior Ministry camouflage pickup trucks. The designation of the paramilitaries responsible for this outrage as Interior Ministry commandos is fully confirmed by eyewitness testimony, which specifies that at least some of the raiders were wearing blue camouflage uniforms of a type very recently introduced to National Police commandos, specifically intended to prevent any other parties from masquerading as National Police commandos. The digitally designed uniforms are supplied by the US. A US Army spokesman was so convinced that the uniforms would have been impossible to replicate that he stated that the raiders could not have been wearing such uniforms. Of course, he was not at the scene. Eyewitnesses contradict him.

The fact that the raid was conducted by Interior Ministry forces was in fact confirmed by Iraqi government spokesman Ali al-Dabbagh, who claimed the mass detention was the work of militiamen who had infiltrated the Interior Ministry.

Since it is almost certain that the raid was carried out by National Police commandos, it is imperative that the following questions are answered immediately and publicly.

- Which National Police or other Interior Ministry force carried out the raid?
- Under whose authority was the raid authorised?
- From whom did the Interior Ministry force obtain the lists of names that were used to select individuals for arrest?
- Where were the international advisers (Special Police Transition Teams) that are embedded with each battalion of National Police Commandos and work with them on a daily basis?
- Where did the police commandos take the detainees?
- Why were aerial surveillance assets not immediately deployed to follow a fleet of pickup trucks through heavy traffic in Baghdad? How many such aerial assets were operating over the Green Zone and other parts of Baghdad at that time?
- Who operates the facility where the detainees were held?
- If detainees were freed as a result of police raids, why have no large scale arrests been made and why has the only detainee to speak on record stated that no such police raid occurred?
- What are the names of the individual police officers who have been held for questioning?
- Have they been charged and if so what have they been charged with?
- Why is the Interior Ministry insisting that the case is now closed, when the Education Minister has provided a list of the name of further detainees and the subsequent release of additional

detainees demonstrates that he is wrong.

- Why is the Interior Ministry insisting that none of the detainees were killed when eyewitnesses reported seeing people brutally murdered in front of them?
- How is it that paramilitary/militia death squads can operate from the Interior Ministry, making full use of US-supplied government equipment, without the knowledge of embedded international training teams and advisors within the Interior Ministry?

It is absolutely clear that neither in this case nor in any of the multitude of other equally harrowing cases that show Interior Ministry involvement with extrajudicial killing can the Iraqi government be trusted with carrying any sort of investigation. In the case of the Jadiriyah torture facility discovered in November 2005, the government has still to make public findings that were promised within weeks. It should also be noted that at that time, US officials promised to increase their efforts to oversee Iraqi detention facilities and police commando units, stating that they would double the number of embedded trainers. Since that promise, extrajudicial killings at the hands of Interior Ministry forces, mostly inside detention facilities, appears to have grown exponentially.

It is equally clear that US authorities in Iraq have no interest in carrying out an investigation or restraining the killers.

It is therefore imperative for teams of international investigators to take on the task with the full cooperation of British and American forces. Manfred Novak, the UN rapporteur for torture has indicated his willingness to undertake such a mission. Such a mission must be immediately supported by all those who honestly claim to seek to halt the genocidal violence in Iraq; those who will not support such a mission must be considered accomplices to crimes against humanity.

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*The appeal to save Iraqi academics, launched in January 2006 by the **BRussells Tribunal**, a network of human rights activists, intellectuals and artists, has called for the protection of local academics and higher level educational institutions, in cooperation with CEOSI (Spain), the Portuguese hearing of the WTI, Iraktribunal.de (Germany), the Swedish Antiwar committee, the International Action Center (USA), the International Association of Middle East Studies (IAMES), the German Middle East Studies Association (DAVO), the European Association for Middle Eastern Studies (EURAMES), and several personalities, like Harold Pinter, José Saramago, Dario Fo, Howard Zinn, Tony Benn, Eduardo Galeano, John Pilger, John Coetzee, Michael Parenti and many others. **See the list of principal endorsers:***

*<http://www.brusselstribunal.org/AcademicsPetitionList.htm> . The **BRussells Tribunal**, part of a worldwide network (the International Anti-Occupation Network), devoted to campaigning against the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq, notes the "systematic liquidation of the country's academics" and is planning further actions to protect the brains that can contribute to the development of the Iraqi society. **You can read and sign the petition online** at <http://www.petitiononline.com/Iraqacad/petition.html> . More info: contact info@brusselstribunal.org*

The Silence of the Lambs? A Cry to Raise Our Voices!

Proof of US orchestration of Death Squads Killings in Iraq

Testimony of Iraqi torture victim confirms the presence of US personnel at the infamous Jadiriyah bunker

Max Fuller, member of the [BRussells](#) Tribunal Advisory Committee

Note 1: On Sectarianism

Note 2: On Genocide

Probably everyone remembers the [discovery](#) of the Jadiriyah detention facility in November 2005. US troops were reported to have uncovered the prison in their hunt for a missing person, only to discover some 170 detainees in horrific conditions, many of them clearly the victims of obscene tortures. Although it was admitted that the facility belonged to the interior ministry and that the detainees were held by a secretive interior ministry force known as the Special Investigations Unit, the story was quickly shuffled away as yet another example of the work of Shiite militiamen, in this instance, as was the vogue at that time, the Badr Brigade[i]. Myriad promises were forthcoming both from the US and Iraqi governments that investigations would be rapidly carried out and better supervision would in future be applied to Iraqi-run detention facilities (for instance the Iraqi government assured the world that a ministerial level investigation would rapidly be carried out, while US officials promised a legal team to go through the detainees' files and a [US embassy spokesman](#) stated that Justice Department and FBI officers would provide technical assistance).

Of course, given the scale of the abuse (flayings, burnings, drillings etc) and the proximity of the perpetrators to the Iraqi government (by dint of working for the Interior Ministry as well as by any possible Badr-SCIRI links) and to the US occupation which had, after all, established them (as numerous reports have amply documented, eg [Knight Ridder](#), 9 May 2005), such investigations were grossly less than what was urgently required – a full and public criminal investigation by independent international agencies. In the event, even these limited promises came to nothing, as the UN Human Rights Office in Iraq recently [highlighted](#). What we have actually seen is neither investigation nor prosecutions, despite the fact that Jadiriyah lies at the heart of the state of fear that Iraq undeniably now is.

In October last year I had the privilege to interview one of the victims of that terrible abuse, the distinguished former Professor of Pedagogy at Baghdad University Tareq Samarree, who had been seized from his home in March 2005 by plain-clothed interior ministry personnel without charge.

Professor Samarree, who provided a horrific first-hand account of the torture that he had suffered as well as details of others who had died and of the disappearance of his son within the Iraqi detention system, never had sight of any hint of judicial process nor any access to the outside world. What made Professor Samarree's story most striking were the details of his release. Professor Samarree's physical condition was so bad when the American soldiers discovered the facility that he, along with around a dozen other detainees, was instantly taken to a local hospital. Here, he and his companions remained without access to lawyers, journalists, officials or even a telephone. In fact, it quickly became clear that these victims of torture were to be returned to Iraqi detention. Professor Samarree, another of whose sons lives in the United States, was fortunate to be able to persuade an American soldier to take pity on him and assist him and two of his companions to escape. The last words the soldier said to Professor Samarree were 'Run, run. Don't look back!'

Within days Professor Samarree had arranged for himself and his family to flee the country. He is now in Europe, where he is claiming political asylum.

The full details of Professor Samarree's story and a detailed account of the US-built Iraqi intelligence apparatus are contained in the article [Ghosts of Jadiriyah](#), published by the [BRussells Tribunal](#). It should be noted that the story was offered on the one-year anniversary of discovery of the Jadiriyah facility to a range of mainstream media publications, including New Yorker, New Statesman, the Independent, The Big Issue, as well as to the radical left publication Z Mag. Of them all, only the New Statesmen and Z Mag were courteous enough even to reply to affirm their rejection. It seemed that Professor Samarree's remarkable story and any further interest in Jadiriyah were simply off the agenda.

But Jadiriyah, with its ghosts and its horror, will not go away.

On 7 February 2007 another former inmate from Jadiriyah, Abbas Z Abid, presented his sworn [testimony](#) at the international peace conference in Kuala Lumpur. Like Professor Samarree's, his description of the torture that he and others underwent is almost too harrowing to bear. What sets his testimony apart and completes our understanding of the grim world of Iraq's secret prisons are the dates of his incarceration. Mr Abid, an electrical engineer from Fallujah who was the Chief Engineer in Baghdad's Science and Technology Ministry, was arrested in August 2005, **but was not released until October 2006**. That means that Mr Abid, like Dr Samarree, was held when the American soldiers raided the facility, but his ordeal did not end there. In fact, not only does Mr Abid describe the ongoing tortures that he was repeatedly subjected **to after the US intervention**, as well as describing the tortures that continued to be inflicted on fellow inmates, including the use of Black and Decker drills and other power tools (Mr Abid names eight fellow detainees who died from their injuries), but Mr Abid states that '**American troops have visited the prison many times** and therefore cannot deny the existence of such a prison'.

The implications of these two testimonies as well as the absence of independent and public scrutiny are obvious. The Occupation has done nothing at all to halt abuse at the Interior Ministry's [network of](#)

[secret prisons](#) or curtail in any way the culture of impunity in which they exist. And let's be absolutely clear what we are talking about here. **This is as close as we can get to the tide of sectarian violence sweeping Iraq**, whose victims are almost invariably arrested by Interior Ministry personnel, who are then horribly tortured within Interior Ministry prisons and whose bodies finally surface in abandoned lots, are dredged from rivers, are buried in shallow graves in the desert or left as human detritus around sewage works (Former human rights chief in Iraq John Pace stated that the majority of killings were being carried out by groups under the control of the Interior Ministry, *Independent*, 26 February 2006, while the [Iraqi Organisation for Follow-up and Monitoring](#) in Iraq found that in 92% of some 3498 cases of extrajudicial killing, the victims had been arrested by Interior Ministry forces). Such would undoubtedly have been the final fate of Professor Samarree and Mr Abid's hapless fellow detainees.

Of course the Americans have always been aware of the existence of this and other horrific dungeons within Interior Ministry facilities. How could they not be? They set them up and continue to operate from the same facilities! And for any who would question the validity of Mr Abid's testimony that American forces were regular visitors, his story is confirmed by Solomon Moore writing in the *Los Angeles Times* (9 July 2006), who stated that the US military had been at the facility before the November raid! And the same happened in Basra. After it was revealed by the Plaid Cymru MP Adam Price that British trained policemen had [tortured prisoners to death](#) with drills, we discovered, through the *New York Times* (!!), that American intelligence officers had been working alongside them at the Jamiyat police station, where they passed on names of suspects knowing that those suspects would end up as the victims of death squads. That is their modus operandi and it is duplicated by British military intelligence units, like the Joint Support Group, who brought their nefarious experience from Northern Ireland (where, as Chris Floyd has recently documented, they [orchestrated sectarian murder](#) through the Ulster Defence Association) straight to Iraq. Thus in Basra we find a paramilitary death squad outfit called the Revenge of God (Thar Allah) nurtured and protected by the British, linked to police intelligence and given control of nightly curfews, despite its boasts of killing members of the former state (see [Ghosts of Jadiriya](#) for a more complete account)!

Since the mainstream western media will not hear such voices as Professor Samarree and Mr Abid, it is absolutely beholden on every decently minded individual as well as every organisation that opposes the illegal occupation of Iraq to demand the truth and bring an end to this monstrous culture of impunity. Jean Paul Sartre noted that the American assault on Vietnam was not only an attack against that nation, but an act of violence directed against the whole of humanity. If we are to have any hope of rescuing our own collective humanity, we must raise our voices to bring an end to the screaming from Iraq.

Two important notes

Note 1: On Sectarianism

The cherished western mainstream media notion, undoubtedly nurtured by false flag covert warfare and so-called psyops, that Iraq has fragmented into a state of intercommunal sectarian civil war is the biggest single impediment to understanding the role of the Anglo-US Occupation in the thousands upon thousands of extrajudicial killings taking place in Iraq.

The testimonies of Professor Samarree and Mr Abid shed some further light on just how far we can see sectarianism as a factor in Iraq's violence. Both accounts describe hearing a language that they believe to be Farsi, as well as, variously, images of Shiite saints and mobile ring tones with Iranian songs. Dr Samarree even states with a high degree of confidence that the head of the Badr Organisation, Hadi al-Amery, attended one of his interrogation sessions.^[ii]

There is no reason to doubt their testimonies. In fact, as newspapers have [revealed](#), and I have documented on multiple occasions, the Badr Brigade/Organisation was among the major political parties in exile from whom the CIA recruited the core of the new intelligence apparatus, an organisation which started out with the innocuous title of the Collection Management and Analysis Directorate (CMAD), a title which masked the fact that in reality it was producing what amounted to death lists to be targeted by its paramilitary wing in conjunction with US (and UK) special forces (See [Ghosts of Jadiriyah](#) for a detailed discussion).

That such parties are running at least some of the worst detention facilities (others are undoubtedly run by Kurdish groups in the north of Iraq) is therefore not surprising and of course their members at every level of responsibility should face justice. But more instructive are their demonstrable links with the Occupation, which I have sought to document. It is this intellectual authorship of extrajudicial killing that the Western anti-occupation movement needs to focus on. If the torturers and killers in Jadiriyah were indeed taking their instruction from Iran, as some would hold, then they not only need to prove that, but in the face of concrete evidence that such forces work in close conjunction with the US (see also [Diyala: a Laboratory of Civil War?](#)), they also need to prove that the US state is working hand in hand with the Iranian state.

In fact, as Kurt Nimmo has highlighted, we know that the Iranian state is being stitched up in Iraq [over fabricated charges](#) of supplying weapons to Shiite groups. As anyone who remembers anything about similar US charges in other theatres of war (such as the [Nicaraguan Migs](#), the [Gulf of Tonkin incident](#) etc etc) will remember, they were all made up! As modern military theorists hold, the major part of contemporary warfare is informational - or better stated, disinformational.

Note 2: On Genocide

The distinguished dissident academic Edward Herman, recently wrote a paper entitled [Iraq: the Genocide Option](#) in which he argued that the US war in Iraq threatened to become genocidal. He was

quite right to point to genocide. With credible figures of [over one million Iraqi casualties](#), another three to four million displaced internally and externally, the total collapse of civic infrastructure and the imminent threat of political disintegration, there must already be a very real question as to whether Iraq continues to exist as a viable nation. To fully substantiate the charge, the only question technically remains establishing intent, although I believe that too is perfectly possible when we consider the statements on partition made by the likes of Leslie Gelb (New York Times [25 November 2003](#), [1 May 2006](#)).

To make his argument, Herman drew upon two analogies: El Salvador and Vietnam. Whilst explicitly acknowledging the existence of the so-called Salvador Option in Iraq, Herman's argument was that genocide had occurred in Vietnam though the direct application of US force with its implementation of weapons of massive destruction, whereas, in El Salvador, where the US had had to resort to more lightly equipped proxy armies, only mass murder had occurred, which he compared with the Phoenix Programme in Vietnam. With the greatest respect, however, I believe that Herman is understating the terrible impact of the Phoenix Programme, the brutal US-sponsored war in El Salvador and the ongoing Salvador Option in Iraq.

First of all, Herman compares El Salvador's estimated death toll of some 100,000 (which Noam Chomsky describes as the crucifixion of the country) with the several (commonly around three) million estimated victims in Vietnam. Whilst one should not doubt the scale of the horror brought to Vietnam and its tragic ongoing legacy, it should be pointed out that to compare these figures is somewhat misleading. El Salvador has a population of some five million, compared to around 10 times as many in Vietnam. Thus it would not be unreasonable to suggest that had El Salvador's Salvador Option been carried out in a country as populous as Vietnam, the direct casualties would have totalled around one million, bringing it instantly into the same order of magnitude as Vietnam. In fact, something very much like this under US auspices did take place in Indonesia. Thus, we can see that with an arsenal of much lighter weapons, including a plentiful array of improvised torture devices, a multitude of human lives can be extinguished. In El Salvador this slaughter was [meticulously organised](#) by the US through the training and provision of its armed forces, through control of its intelligence departments and through strategically placed advisors at every level of the Salvadoran Armed Forces.

And the results of the US war in El Salvador were the economic subjugation of the country, including dollarisation, with an uncounted human toll in terms of blocked social reform and the entrenchment of poverty. In the sense that the hopes and dreams of emancipation from economic slavery of the poor majority were drowned in rivers of blood, this too was a genocide.

It also seems unduly dismissive to describe the Phoenix Program as only accounting for the deaths of around 40,000 Vietnamese. The point of the Phoenix Programme was that it was a systematic campaign of targeted killing in South Vietnam designed to destroy the leadership of the resistance movements (including the leaders of the unarmed social resistance) and terrorise the population into obedience (as in El Salvador). As such it formed an important tactical contribution to what amounted to a genocidal attack against the Vietnamese, whose aim was to extinguish that people's hope of

national development. Nor should the value of the eventual exposure of the Phoenix Program be regarded as insignificant. The effect of this exposure was to give the necessary impetus to closing down the Office of Public Safety (*Supplying Repression*, Institute for Policy Studies, 1981), whose various programmes contributed to the implementation of repressive security apparatuses around the world and certainly added to growing pressure for US withdrawal from Vietnam. We will never know what effect its earlier exposure might have had if more people had been prepared to break the silence.

In his address to the Bertrand Russell Tribunal on Vietnam, Jean Paul Sartre specifically addressed the question of genocide. Sartre argued that the US could conduct genocide in Vietnam not because it had the means, but because its lack of significant economic interests meant that there was nothing to lose and the salutary effect of this lesson in apocalypse would not be lost on other nations bidding for independence.

In Iraq (with its much smaller population) the US has already matched in scale the violence perpetrated on Vietnam and the war goes on, although there is little indication that it has given up its economic interests. Undoubtedly a very great part of this violence is conducted directly by US forces (the extremely credible [Lancet study](#) suggests from 30-40%), but, despite surges, that proportion appears to be falling. That leaves perhaps as many as 500,000 violent deaths unattributed to Coalition military action. Herman states that some of these would belong to the Salvador Option, while the bulk of the others would fall into the pattern that he explicitly describes as large-scale communal civil war manipulated by the US. I think it is vital that we all remember that this inter-communal sectarian warfare [still consists](#) of anonymous bombs that target the Shia and which most Iraqis for good reason believe are the work of the occupation and sectarian killings of Sunnis by members of the security forces – along with academics, engineers, lawyers, trade unionists, imams, doctors, teachers and other state functionaries by paramilitary forces operating from the Ministry of the Interior^[iii]. This is indeed the application of the Salvador Option and it contributes an essential part of the ongoing genocide in Iraq.

[i] The charge that the Badr Brigade was responsible for most of acts of sectarian violence through its alleged infiltration of the Interior Ministry Police Commandos was [revised almost overnight](#) following the bombing of the Samarra Mosque in February 2006. From that moment on the majority of complaints against Shiite militiamen were levelled against the so-called Mehdi Army associated with Muqtada al Sadr. No explanation has ever been provided as to how such a switch could have come about, especially perplexing given that it was [explicitly clear](#) that police units were the primary culprits prior to Samarra.

[ii] The very fact that Mr Abid is able to describe the special attention given to Sunni detainees demonstrates that there were Shiites among the detainees, a fact commonly glossed over. In addition, Mr Abid was neither detained by the Badr Brigade nor the Mehdi Army but by US and Iraqi forces (the Muthana Brigade, which, despite reported reverence for Muqtada al Sadr, continues to host US

advisors), before being handed over to the Special Investigation Unit.

[iii] In each of the high profile accounts of supposed sectarian attacks and massacres that have taken place within the last year a detailed examination of the evidence demonstrates that the violence specifically occurred within the context of security operations and/or directly under the noses of Occupation forces. Examples include Operation Knockout in [Baquba](#), the assault on the [Adhamiya](#) district of Baghdad, the massacre in the [Jihad](#) district of Baghdad, the massacre in [Balad](#) and the mass abduction from the [Ministry of Education](#).

State-Sanctioned Paramilitary Terror in Basra Under British Occupation

Max Fuller, member of the **BRussells** Tribunal Advisory Committee.

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Abstract

Whilst Iraqi prime minister Maliki's spring offensive in Basra has provoked wide speculation about the extent to which it was an autonomous Iraqi government operation and on its success or lack of success in curbing the power of the so-called Mahdi Army, the reported capture and execution of one of Basra's most important political figures has gone almost entirely unremarked. From the fragmentary record available, this article examines the role of Yussef Sinawee al Mosawi and his Thar Allah (God's Revenge) militia organisation. In the conflict between Thar Allah and the Basra governor's Fadhila (Virtue) party it is possible to identify a political schism that lies at the heart of Iraq's future, both in terms of ongoing efforts towards Balkanisation and the theft of its oil industry. An examination of Thar Allah and its relations with the world of covert operations also reveals a great deal about the extent of British involvement in the violence that has racked this economically vital city and suggests how counterinsurgency warfare plays an essential role in continuing politics by other means.

The Life, Murderous Times and Enigmatic Death of Sayed Yussef Sinawee al Mosawi

The Enigmatic Death

On 20 April 2008 it was reported on the website *al Badeel al Iraqi* that the leader of the Thar Allah militia Yusuf Mosawi had been executed in Baghdad under the supervision of Abu Mujahid, an adviser to Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki[1].

Few in the west are likely to have even heard of the Thar Allah (God's Revenge) organisation, let alone

its chairman, Sayed Yussef Sinawee al Mosawi, yet the detention of this militia-commander-cum-radical-Shiite-cleric as part of the much-slated 'Knights Assault' in Basra in March was important enough within the politics of contemporary Iraq to warrant mention by both the Oil Minister Shahrستاني[2] and the prime minister himself, speaking in an interview on CNN[3].

If it is true that Mosawi has indeed been executed, whilst many Iraqis might well breathe a sigh of relief, it is beyond any doubt that his killing after just some two weeks' detention constitutes yet another political murder to add to the thousands upon thousands of others of which Mosawi and Thar Allah may very well be a part.

Even amid the chaotic politics and genocidal violence that has gripped Iraq from the outset of the Anglo-American occupation, an examination of the extremist Shiite militia Thar Allah may well offer seriously concerned onlookers an opportunity to see beyond the popular media paradigms of 'sectarian civil war' and the 'oil and militia' politics of the south.

Murderous Times

Thar Allah is said to have been one of four new Islamist organisations that opened offices in Basra in October 2003.[4] Although Thar Allah has been almost exclusively identified with the internal politics of Basra, it was reported that the organisation already had additional offices in Nasiriyah, Missan and Talha, and intended to open others in Baghdad, Diwaniya and Karbala.[5] In fact, it was subsequently reported that an armed group operating in Baghdad and Tikrit going by the name Thar Allah issued a statement on 1 November 2003 in which it claimed that its membership was drawn from 'all the factions of Iraqi people'. The group is recorded as issuing a statement in which it claimed to be 'hunting down and killing supporters of the Saddam Hussein regime, specifically those who worked in the security and intelligence services'.[6]

It seems extremely likely that this is in fact the same or a related organisation to the 'militant Shia' Thar Allah that appears in Basra less than two weeks later under the leadership of Sayed Yussif al Mosawi, who claims that 'We have confirmed information that groups from al-Qaeda, dozens of them, have crossed the borders from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia ... [and] are here to coordinate with former Saddam men.'[7]

It is precisely at this time that a second wave of killings of members of the former government begins in Basra, with 12 recorded deaths in October alone.[8] From this savage new beginning, these killings are linked with a White Toyota Sedan without plates that will later become identified as the Death Car.[9]

At almost exactly the same time that Thar Allah pops up in Basra and murders of Baathists begin, the British are known to have been not merely deploying raw police onto Basra's streets, but building up a new intelligence apparatus[10], initially identified as the Special Operations Department[11], based at

the Jameat police station. The head of this 'hard but effective'[12] 45-man unit was a former member of another Shiite militia, the Badr Brigade, associated with one of the main exiled Iraqi opposition parties (now a major part of government), the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)(13)[13], yet a murky relationship between Thar Allah and the Special Operations Department already existed. According to anonymous interviews with 'coalition intelligence and military officials' conducted by Knights and Williams on behalf of the Western Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) in 2006:

While Badr elements in police intelligence identified former Baathists and detained some in unauthorized prisons, other SCIRI-affiliated movements used police supplied intelligence to undertake targeted killings of Sunnis and Shiites accused of Baath-era crimes. The best known of these organisations was Thar Allah... [Although British forces had strong indicators to suggest such activities were carried out by SCIRI-affiliated groups, the movement's careful courting of the coalition and its use of 'cutouts' such as the police intelligence unit and Thar Allah shielded it from further scrutiny].[14]

However much British forces had been hoodwinked by SCIRI, it is clear that they were aware of the crimes being committed by their own Special Operations Department, as well as Thar Allah. In fact, by early 2004 such crimes had become so apparent that even *The Sunday Times* was accusing the British-backed Police Intelligence of killing former Baath Party members[15], while the Western media in general had recognised that 'groups posing as Islamic parties', including Thar Allah, were meting out brutal street justice, including tracking down former Baathists, running illegal checkpoints, conducting house searches and punishing those 'deemed to have flouted Islamic customs'.[16]

Leaving the Special Operations Department aside for now, given such appearance, the recorded behaviour of British forces towards Thar Allah appears all the more remarkable. One incident in autumn 2003 involved the arrest of six alleged Baathist 'insurgents' by Thar Allah, who apparently confessed on videotape to a number of bombings. The men were held in 'hopes of tracing the remaining plotters' (for which we should undoubtedly read tortured) until the intervention of British forces, who arrested both the six Baathists along with 13 members of Thar Allah, but the Thar Allah militiamen were all released the following day.[17]

By March 2004, British officials still claimed that Thar Allah and other Shiite political groups had generally behaved responsibly.[18] Yet less than a week later, it briefly appeared that British forces had had a change of heart when they are reported to have attempted to evict Thar Allah from its illegally occupied headquarters[19] and confiscated light weapons.[20] But once again, Thar Allah was quickly let off the hook, with the 'coalition apologising to the group and returning its weapons'.[21] In relation to this leniency and in spite of their obligations under International Law, one British officer had this to say: 'We are not in the business of charging around arresting people'. Basra's deputy police chief was even more candid in regard to Thar Allah: 'we share the same views and they help us with security'.

For the remainder of 2004 Thar Allah and its leader Yussef Mosawi seems to disappear from view, presumably left to continue helping the police with security, detaining and murdering former Baathists, imposing brutal street justice a la Sharia law and generally contributing to the ‘scores, possibly hundreds’ of political assassinations that had been reported by May.[22] Nonetheless, behind the scenes, changes were being made within Basra’s intelligence apparatus. According to the journalist Stephen Grey, the British attempted to close down the Special Operations Department, but that ‘despite their efforts, it returned in other guises’, while the worst abuses were driven underground (at one point British forces discovered that it had been torturing prisoners in a nextdoor nightclub). By the end of the year, Grey records that the Special Operations Department had been renamed the Criminal Investigation Department. He also claims that the British had spent all year attempting to remove the Chief of Police, identified as Brigadier Ali. However, Ali had refused to go and had established an Internal Affairs Department run by a former Badr member that had been ‘conducting an internal reign of terror inside the police’.[23] According to the US State Department, following allegations by the Iraqi police that Internal Affairs was responsible for the killings of 10 former Baathists, the chief of intelligence was removed in December, but retained command of Internal Affairs.[24] In so far as punitive action is concerned, from their anonymous interviews with British insiders, Knights and Williams report that when transition took place in June, British ‘entreaties to cull the Jameat threatened deeply entrenched factional interests’ and consequently fell on deaf ears. The result was that the ‘many factional and sectarian murders committed by the Jameat went unpunished’[25].

Pausing to analyse the period to the end of 2004 briefly, we may note just how remarkable these reports really are. What we are being told is that in the first six to eight months of occupation, the British occupiers of Basra built up an intelligence-based special police unit drawn from selected Shiite militiamen which, in conjunction with certain other paramilitary militia units, more or less instantly set about murdering its political opponents from the former government and imposing an extremist Islamist form of social cleansing. Having set this monster loose on the streets of Basra, British forces then not only failed to reign it in, but on two occasions behaved with what appears to be extraordinary leniency towards one of the associated paramilitary militias, Thar Allah, despite their ongoing obligation to provide security to the residents of Basra. In relation to such heinous derelictions of duty, British spokesmen’s responses were to insist that ‘we are not in the business of running around arresting people’ and that ‘violent deBaathification will come to its own conclusion’[26]. Furthermore, despite the failed entreaties to ‘cull the Jameat’, following ‘transition’ Assistant Chief Constable Stephen White, a veteran from Northern Ireland, received an OBE for his role in setting up the policing structures in southern Iraq.[27]

A Political Life

On 30 January 2005 Iraqis went to the polls. One of the candidates was Yussef Mosawi, running on behalf of the Thar Allah political party as part of the Coalition of Islamic Basra (*Al-Ittilaf al-Basra al-Islamiyya*), dominated by SCIRI. According to Knights and Williams, the January elections in Basra

were 'marred by violent intimidation beforehand and equally brutal recriminations afterwards'.

But the 30 January elections did not mark Mosawi's formal entry into Basra's factious political scene. On 16 January an Iraqi newspaper had already recorded that:

Al-Basra Council has decided to assign to Mr Youssif al-Mossowi, the member of the council and the head of the higher supervisory commission as a daily supervisor for working of checkpoints subordinating for Basra Police leadership...

Al-Mossowi said that his work has been done in coordination with Basra Police Leadership, especially during the night to monitor the negligence and duty elusion, confirming that this realized to guarantee security pre-elections period and ensure security during the election.[28]

So the head of the Islamist Thar Allah militia organisation that had for the previous year been linked to political killings and social cleansing was not only running in the January elections, but *supervising* a political process described as being 'marred by violent intimidation beforehand and equally brutal recrimination afterwards'. On top of that, this man was the head of a 'higher supervisory commission' and ran the police checkpoints that must have allowed his and other paramilitary militiamen unimpeded access to their victims. It is beyond any reasonable doubt that by now British forces must have been fully cognizant of who Mosawi was and had endorsed his role on the higher supervisory commission, where they will undoubtedly have placed their agents and advisers. At this time, not one Iraqi police or military unit was even able to take the lead in operations and we must therefore assume absolutely the deep continuing involvement of British forces at every level of the security apparatus in Basra.[29]

In regard to the 'brutal recriminations afterwards', we may suggest that one of the chief reasons for the such recrimination was that, despite winning 20 of 41 seats on the Basra Provincial Council, the Coalition of Islamic Basra was marginally outgunned by an alliance of the other main parties, dominated by Fadhila (a party of the Sadrist current that does not recognise Muqtada al Sadr as a source of authority). It was from Fadhila that the new governor, Muhamad al-Waeli was drawn, but power in Basra remained deeply divided and the influence of Mosawi and others remained substantial. In fact, according to Knights and Williams, it was precisely at this time that 'Using militiamen serving in the security forces, Sadrist factions and SCIRI affiliates such as Badr and Thar Allah accelerated their intimidation of local university professors, trade unionists, and other secular figures' to the extent that the early months of 2005 'witnessed unprecedented levels of political violence and crime'.[30] Again we must note this qualification that it is militiamen **servicing in the security forces** that are responsible for carrying out political violence and intimidation, ie it is the very OBE-worthy institutions established by the British that are responsible for the violence.

An example of this influence in action was demonstrated in what at the time was an extremely mysterious report in *The Telegraph*, describing negotiations on the appointment of a new chief of police

between the governor and the head of Thar Allah. According to the report it was obvious that power lay with the 'bearded cleric puffing on a cigarette'.^[31] The outcome of these negotiations is illuminating, for the new police chief, Hassan al-Sade, presumably Mosawi's favourite (a later source claims that Sade, a former officer in marine special forces, was appointed by Alawi^[32], was the former head of the British trained Tactical Support Unit^[33] and a strong supporter of British 'attempts to purge the [police] force of militia elements'.^[34]

Whilst the record for Thar Allah again largely goes quiet until October 2005^[35], it is known that in response to the success of Fadhila, which at this time also held the Oil Ministry in Baghdad, Thar Allah became part of another SCIRI-led alliance, known as the Pentacle House (*al-Bayt al-Khumasi*), alongside the Badr Organisation, *Sayid al-Shuhada* (Master of Martyrs) and *Mu'assasat Shahid al-Mahrab* (another SCIRI affiliate). According to the International Crisis Group, 'Despite their tense relations, the Sadrists and SCIRI are informally allied against Fadhila' [and remember that it is exactly this combination of Sadrist factions and SCIRI affiliates which is blamed for the violence through its presence in the security forces!].^[36]

The significance of the Pentacle House alliance rivalry with Fadhila and its allies is that it defines the key political schism in Basra. Most fundamental, the SCIRI-dominated position leads the charge for the creation of a Shiite super state in the south of Iraq^[37], whilst Fadhila and its allies have supported an integrationist, nationalist position, despite assertions that the governor has complained about lack of resources reaching the south^[38]. The immediate goal of the Pentacle House alliance is the ousting of Governor Waeli.

In August Thar Allah once more emerges briefly, when it is accused of attempting to murder a former naval officer, indicating its continuing role in political violence. After the family of the naval officer successfully drove off Thar Allah, they were arrested by the police, detained and tortured for over a week.^[39]

Before moving on to the most significant episode involving Thar Allah it is first necessary to examine the most spectacular event that took place in Basra in 2005 (at least through the prism of the western media) and which sparked the most dramatic and perhaps unexpected political crisis. In September, two undercover British service personnel in Arab disguise were arrested by Iraqi police and detained at the Jameat police station^[40]. The two men were heavily armed (accusations were made that the car in which they were spotted contained bomb-making equipment) and opened fire on the Iraqi police in an attempt to avoid arrest. Rather than negotiate, answer questions about the identities or activities of the two agents or allow the Iraqi legal system to take its course, British forces instead chose to assault the Jameat and release the detainees by force. Several Iraqi civilians were shot dead in the angry protests that the assault provoked, with many Iraqis concluding that the two agents had been planning to plant a bomb in a civilian area^[41]. If British forces were not in the business of running around arresting people, it seemed that they were most definitely in the business of running around shooting Iraqis and destroying Iraqi infrastructure rather than face Iraqi scrutiny over the actions of top-secret

paramilitary agents. In the event, despite the destruction to the Jameat itself, the two men were actually 'rescued' from another building to which they had been moved by armed militiamen under the nose of the presiding Iraqi judge. Curiously, following the snatch by 'militiamen' the two undercover operatives were better treated[42] and had been left entirely unguarded by the time that British forces recovered them, as though two sets of hands were at work within the Iraqi security apparatus!

The assault of the Jameat produced two obvious and hugely significant consequences. The first was that the governing council under the leadership of Governor Waeli immediately suspended cooperation with the British.

The second was that the governor ordered his own raid just weeks later on 22 October on the headquarters of Thar Allah. The circumstances and consequences of this raid were almost entirely unreported in the western media, but we can begin to reconstruct it from a number of partial reports, chief amongst which are a series of testimonials given to the Monitoring Net for Human Rights in Iraq and passed on to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq.[43]

The first key point is that the raid appears to have been devised in response to allegations that government vehicles had been stolen or misused by Thar Allah, specifically in cases of abduction. The second key point is that the raid resulted in the discovery of some 50 illegal detainees (mostly Sunnis and some of them members of the Baath Party according to the testimonials) and the arrest of a similar number of paramilitary militiamen from the Iraqi Lions Movement, which appears to have operated from Thar Allah's headquarters. The militiamen are said to have confessed to carrying out 'rapes, robberies, assassinations, and to extorting money from business owners and university professors'. The third key point is that the police conducting the raid insisted that they had seized evidence implicating Iranian intelligence in recent violence in Basra, including armed attacks and plots to assassinate political leaders (including Governor Waeli). Unsurprisingly, a Thar Allah spokesman insisted that the raid had been politically motivated and that the governor had spread rumours that cars used to commit crimes had been seen near the mosque (HQ) to justify his actions. But perhaps most importantly, we learn from the testimonials that no mere militia commander, fundamentalist cleric, political councillor, head of higher supervisory commission nor overseer of night time checkpoints, Yussef Mosawi is also an official of the Interior Affairs department in the Jamiyat, where he is responsible for police vehicles!

Whatever the exact circumstances, this raid and arrests (reportedly including Mosawi) would appear to have provided an ideal opportunity for British forces to become involved in an effort to expose any Iranian involvement[44], clean up corruption, improve security and perhaps repair relations with the governor. In the event, it seems that the British position was, if anything, obstructive and the raid is almost completely missing in the Western media. If we can assume that the governor did not order a second raid against Thar Allah in 2006, the ICG report *Lessons from Basra* claims that the governor ordered the army and the police to 'launch an offensive' against Thar Allah, but that the two generals in charge refused. The governor was forced to sign a new order, assuming entire responsibility for the

operation, in order to carry out the raid. Whatever raid this passage refers to, the important point is that the two recalcitrant generals were the key British allies in Basra and must have discussed the matter with their British counterparts.

In late November, while British forces were conducting an ‘underground campaign to stamp out the vicious bloodletting between Sunnis and Shiites’[45], the Ministry of the Interior sent a team with US advisors to shake up the Basra police.[46] The result was the reorganisation of Internal Affairs, with supposedly corrupt officers simply shifted to another department.[47]

The ‘underground campaign’ itself was described by Knights and Williams as follows:

A wave of further arrests continued throughout the autumn of 2005 into early 2006, with British forces targeting a range of SCIRI, Sadrist and Thar Allah militia cells within the local police forces and municipal organs.[48]

According to several authoritative subsequent write-ups it was this confluence of police intelligence and Thar Allah that the British had moved against. For instance:

In September, British forces first moved against elements of Tharallah and the most corrupt units in the Basra constabulary, including the Department of Internal Affairs, the Criminal Intelligence Unit and the Serious Crimes Unit. Elements from these three organisations work with Tharallah to carry out contract killings and sophisticated roadside bomb attacks on British forces.[49]

It sounded like a promising development from the perspective of the civilian population of Basra, yet the rate of killings actually escalated under the impact of the ‘underground campaign’, with the majority of attacks ‘perpetrated by elements wearing Iraqi police uniform, as well as elements of a special force affiliated with the Iraqi Interior Ministry which was dissolved [ie Internal Affairs]’ according to British military commander Alex Wilson.[50] And despite the campaign, Mosawi himself had reappeared to participate in the January 2006 elections.

By May the political crisis sparked after the assault on the Jameat was still not resolved. On 14 May the governor is reported to have organised a demonstration in support of his decision to suspend the chief of police, Hassan Sawadi, to demand the resignation of the new Iraqi Army’s Basra-based 10th Division commandeer, General Abdul Latif Thaban and to blame two prominent Shiite clerics for a recent upsurge in violence.[51] It appears the governor’s chief criticism had been failure to prevent the ongoing waves of extrajudicial killings.[52]

The day afterwards, ‘in Basra, about 2000 followers of Shiite Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani marched in protest at allegations from the regional governor linking local clerics to terrorism.[53] Subsequently we learned that it was Mosawi that had been tasked with organising and leading a demonstration to ‘up the ante against Waeli that had ‘degenerated into clashes’.[54]

On the same day as these demonstrations the new prime minister, Maliki, was establishing a special Basra Emergency Security Committee. The emergency committee is reported to have struggled to replace the provincial security committee until a compromise was reached with Waeli, whereby he would head a security committee selected by the prime minister from 'SCIRI, Fadhila and the Sadrist trend politicians'.^[55] Unfortunately, we don't know whether Mosawi was appointed to the new security committee, but we do know that by February 2007 he had been appointed to the role of deputy governor^[56] and by April 2008 he was described as a 'prominent and feared member of Basra's provincial council and security committee'!^[57] If Britain's 'underground campaign' had been designed to curb violence it was an abject failure; if it had been designed to curb the power and influence of Thar Allah and Yussef Mosawi it was equally ineffectual. In fact, Thar Allah continued to operate with the same brazen sense of impunity.

In June 2006 in a predawn raid 20 gunmen dressed in commando camouflage are reported to have stormed a police station to free three members of Thar Allah charged with killing police officers.^[58] Then in July, taking a break from killing Baathists and other political opponents, it was Yossef Mosawi who took charge of recruiting and enlisting militants to fight alongside Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon.^[59]

The year of 2006 climaxed with yet another dramatic and seemingly inexplicable^[60] episode under the auspices of Britain's latest effort to rehabilitate the police force and prepare for handover of authority, Operation Sinbad. On Christmas Day British forces conducted a second major assault on the Jameat police station (said to have been demolished the first time).^[61] The huge military operation was now targeted primarily against the Serious Crimes Unit and culminated with the early morning demolition of the entire complex using bar mines. Whilst detainees were apparently rescued^[62], computers were retrieved and the operation was touted as something of a success, it is difficult to entirely share the sense of jubilation. Despite or because of the huge military operation, the Serious Crimes Unit itself had already vacated the premises!^[63] (The farce seems to have been entirely lost on most journalists, especially the BBC's Huw Williams, who claimed 'the demolition of the building was a visible symbol of the hope that the serious crimes carried out by police officers based there should now come to an end'!) According to a Basra governate official, it was the Major Crimes Unit [sic] that had been penetrated both by Iranians and by Tha'r Allah members, while *The Times* agreed that the Serious Crimes Unit worked with Thar Allah to carry out contract killings and deadly roadside attacks.^[64]

Following the arrest of just seven members of the 400-strong Serious Crimes Squad and its rehabilitation elsewhere under the new title of the Major Crimes Unit (No doubt for Huw Williams this would have constituted a semantic symbol of hope!), neither Thar Allah nor Yussef Mosawi disappeared from the scene. Equally, the conflict between Fadhila and the SCIRI-Thar Allah axis continued to simmer throughout 2007, with both SCIRI and Tha'r Allah calling in March for swift local elections in hopes of displacing Waeli.^[65] These elections seem to have become the main focus of

attention in 2007, with one Thar Allah commander stating that he had told all city council members that ‘You have to make a choice. You either vote against the governor or you die’.[66] In August Mosawi himself claimed that ‘We are prepared for the upcoming battle, and concrete barriers won’t save [Fadhila],’ and that if local elections ‘aren’t held, we will use force to kick Fadhila out’.[67] Thar Allah’s centrality was hinted at in several more articles in the Western media, which highlighted both the ready access to patronage that Mosawi was able to enjoy as well as his ongoing role in the paramilitary arena.[68] In September, Mosawi was actually able to roll out for a visiting journalist a classified map of the city prepared by the British military, showing the level of violence in July.[69] Though when asked how he had obtained the map, Mosawi joked ‘They steal it for us’, it seems much more likely that Basra’s deputy governor had access to such maps from his role on the security committee, if not to any other official or quasi-official security appointments.

The Knights’ Assault and the Sons of Basra

Against a backdrop of ongoing violence, the stage appeared to be set for an epic confrontation between the SCIRI-Thar Allah axis and Fadhila. According to Mosawi:

The local conflict cannot be separated from the broader struggle between West and East because of Basra’s strategic location and vast resources ... Now, Basra is at the crossroads of an Iranian-American struggle, an Iranian-Arab struggle, the struggle between factions inside Iran and an American war against Islam as a whole. Every actor in this string of conflicts is striving to take up positions in Basra to influence the course of events. Iran is supporting the Islamist parties with which it has enjoyed longstanding ties, whereas the US is supporting local and regional forces that are capable of challenging Iran’s influence.[70]

One year after his geopolitical assessment, this ‘powerful young warlord’ had been arrested by Iraqi and Coalition forces during the major spring 2000 offensive known as the Knights’ Assault.

So was this the ‘upcoming battle’ at the crossroads of so many struggles for which Thar Allah had been preparing, and could the seeming demise of this militant cleric popularly believed to have been an Iranian agent[71] at the hands of Iraqi and Coalition forces signal a victory in the East verses West, Iran verses America geopolitical conflict for influence?

Addressing the second question, we can say not if we are to believe Musawi, who apparently never saw himself or Thar Allah as one of the Iran-backed Islamist parties! In fact, Musawi accused just about everyone else, including Fadhila, of operating in the interests of Iran[72]. But nor, apparently, did he see himself as an ally of the West, insisting that ‘Coalition forces are usurpers, plunderers, and occupiers and must be resisted... I am doing that’.[73]

To the first question, the answer may yet well be yes. Whilst a great deal of speculation has surrounded the Knights’ Assault[74], it’s apparent failure and the apparent division it shows between prime

minister Maliki and the US[75], it is very possible that most of the authors of such speculation have overlooked its critical dimensions in their haste to pigeonhole the current dynamic as anti-Sadrism (just as they insisted on pigeonholing previous dynamics as anti-al Qaeda or as sectarian conflict or even as attempts to stem 'sectarian violence'). In addition to ostensibly cracking down on Thar Allah, the offensive also targeted 'elements from al-Fadhila' and others[76]. Among the moves was the disbanding of the Oil Protection Force, widely regarded as the military power base of Fadhila, and its replacement by an Interior Ministry controlled Oil Police[77].

These operations by a government which draws much of its support from one half of the SCIRI-Thar Allah axis may very well represent efforts to exert control in the two principle and related issues that confront Iraq. The first issue is that of the upcoming provincial elections scheduled for October 2008, dominated in this region by the issue of the creation of a southern nine-province Shiite superstate whose existence will mark a major step on the road towards partition that so many imperialist ideologues have long advocated. Whilst Waeli appears pleased by the results of the Knights Assault, claiming that Basra is no longer dominated by 'militias'[78], it remains very much to be seen what the election will bring in terms of Iraq's future.

The second issue is the privatisation of Iraq's oil industry. With the moves against the Oil Protection Force and Fadhila, amid charges of smuggling, it appears Maliki may be attempting to unseat those forces that have stood in the way of a privatisation agenda that seems set to see the return of the same oil companies expelled by the Baath in 1972[79]. Once again, only time will truly reveal how successful these efforts will be.

If Thar Allah and Yussef Mosawi have truly been removed from the scene, it is perhaps because they have already fulfilled their purpose, whatever agenda they may have believed it was they served. If we glance briefly at the record, insofar as it is known, of this fundamentalist Shiite paramilitary militia, it appears that Thar Allah functioned as one arm of a secret security apparatus that has been instrumental in eliminating the vestiges of the former state as well as carrying out a policy of sectarian cleansing that we are told has almost emptied Iraq's second city of its Sunni population[80] and enforcing an Islamic authoritarianism that must undoubtedly contribute to the suppression of dissenting voices.

It now appears that the reign of terror that Thar Allah and such other 'cutouts' as the police intelligence unit have imposed on Basra are likely to have served the long-term interests of both the architects of Iraq's Balkanisation and the oil majors looking for a 'foot in the door', since both these projects seem to have accorded with the SCIRI-Thar Allah axis. Perhaps it is small wonder then to learn from the *New York Times* That US intelligence agents were working with the intelligence unit in the Jameat, passing on 'tips, like the location of people suspected of being insurgents', knowing full well that they would find their way into the hands of Basra's death squads[81]. Similarly, the explanation that Thar Allah and its cohorts wittingly or unwittingly operated in the interests of the occupation is the only possible serious explanation for the record of impunity that we encounter,

especially including the return of arms to an organisation that had already been linked with political killings and the presence of its leader in key security positions.

In fact, for anyone who has looked at covert warfare and its role in counterinsurgency operations, the use of such paramilitary militias as an instrument of state policy is not only plausible, it is fundamental! The primary mechanism for conducting such intelligence-based counterinsurgency warfare is the consolidation of a specialist intelligence-gathering agency, which both provides the targets for and handles a range of paramilitary actors who carry out a strategy for which, out of political expediency (due to its fundamental illegality and immorality), the state must remain distanced. The US has carried out such strategies with great vigour in its interventionist wars in South-East Asia and Latin America. The victims, intended and unintended, run into hundreds of thousands. But it was Britain, as it was gradually divested of its colonial possessions after the Second World War, that wrote the modern handbook of counterinsurgency. Those who continue to doubt that the use of proxy paramilitaries, counter-terror and so-called pseudo operations are particularly 'British' or somehow outside the 'rules of cricket' should read the works of General Frank Kitson, who gained his experience dealing with 'civil revolts' in Kenya, Malaya, Oman, Cyprus and Northern Ireland.[82]

It was Kitson's principles that were eventually to be deployed in the conflict in Northern Ireland and which led to the creation of a culture of collusion between the special branch of the RUC, a secretive military intelligence outfit known as the Force Research Unit and Loyalist Protestant paramilitaries in which Catholics could be murdered with impunity, according to the findings of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens[83]. An account of the experience of this state-sanctioned violence by Jeffrey Slukka is deeply instructive for an understanding of the situation in Iraq.[84]

Just as in Iraq, we find that the popular media portrayal of this violence was to stereotype it as intercommunal sectarian violence. In Northern Ireland patient study and courageous investigation has revealed that far from constituting a cycle of 'tit for tat' revenge killings (the same label that is continually applied in Iraq), the majority of the victims were Catholic civilians murdered for the most part by serving and former members of the security forces, moonlighting in organisations that went by names like the Ulster Volunteer Force and Ulster Freedom Fighters.

Again, it may be of surprise to some to discover that even after the exposure of the activities of the Force Research Unit, action has not been taken to prosecute those responsible for creating the 'culture of collusion'; instead it seems that the unit has been shipped more or less wholesale to Iraq, where it plies its trade under the similarly innocuous sounding title of the Joint Support Group, with its primary mission being 'to recruit and run covert human intelligence sources or agents'.[85] In Northern Ireland such covert human intelligence sources or agents included paramilitary killers like Brian Nelson, head of intelligence for the Ulster Defence Association and Albert Baker, whose gang was responsible for the notorious 'Romper Room' murders.[86]

So if for a moment we step outside the media paradigm of rival Iranian-backed Shiite militias all

competing over the smuggling of oil while simultaneously turning Basra into an Islamist hell, despite the best efforts of British forces, we can simply ask what should we expect the application of counterinsurgency warfare to look like in Basra. Put simply, we should expect to find a security committee at provincial level coordinating the combined efforts of a range of civil, military, police and para-military organisations. Below this we should expect to find some sort of centralised 'special branch' joint intelligence establishment that would include interrogation facilities, where British and/or American advisors would oversee an expansive intelligence gathering operation aimed not so much at 'terrorists' or individual fighters, but at the 'subversive' civilian 'infrastructure' of their political opponents, whether that be members of political parties or activists within supposed 'front' organisations, such as human rights agencies or trades unions. The 'intelligence' acquired primarily through interrogation would then be passed down to the various agencies, sometimes via 'cutouts', for target identification. At the extremity of this apparatus would be paramilitary units, specifically intended to maintain the maximum possible distance between the architects of the counterinsurgency policy and the application of this method of warfare.

In Basra we catch glimpses of a higher supervisory commission and security committee whose role is to coordinate security operations. We find a major intelligence operations facility established by the British housing a Special Operations Department-cum-Criminal Investigation Department where detainees are routinely interrogated/tortured. Here we find the presence of US intelligence agents/advisers, whose role is to compile lists of suspected enemies. We find that the majority of 'militia violence' is carried out by agents who are at the same time members of the security forces. And we can just make out one specific paramilitary unit whose mandate includes eliminating members of the former ruling party on the pretext of security, whose leader enjoys privileged access to classified military maps and operates the nightly curfew, and which has been repeatedly and inexplicably nurtured by British forces. With this in mind, it is not hard to understand how a paradigm of failure, lack of planning, foreign infiltration, etc, etc must be preferred by the powerful to the only other conceivable alternative.

The execution of Yussef Mosawi, however deserved it may appear to have been, has done nothing to advance accountability or justice in post-invasion Iraq. Instead it must be seen as yet another political act of violence in a long and gruesome chain whose object is to protect the guilty and conceal the truth. In the absence of a far more thorough exposure of the secret war in Basra, it is foolhardy at the very least to attempt political analyses that cannot even establish the true relationships of the various actors.

To the consternation and embarrassment of the British state, the photograph of a number of British soldiers recently appeared in the *The Purple Standard*, a publication which praises the exploits of the outlawed Ulster Volunteer Force, a banned loyalist paramilitary group. The soldiers were pictured in Basra wearing orange sashes and playing flutes to their office, under the title 'The Rising Sons of Basra'.^[87] As our eyes recover from the dazzling glow of the media spotlights and begin to accustom themselves to the dim world of paramilitary counterinsurgency warfare, we may begin to see that the

Rising Sons of Basra are the Sons of Northern Ireland, are the Sons of Rhodesia, are the Sons of Kenya, are the Sons of Malaya, and are the Sons of every conflict where a blood-red sun refuses to finally set on the neo-colonial vestiges of Empire.

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Footnotes

[1] "Leader of Tharallah militia died under torture", Roads to Iraq, 20 April 2008 – URL:

<http://www.roadstoiraq.com/2008/04/20/leader-of-tharallah-militia-died-under-torture/>

[2] "Basra strike against Shiite militias also about oil", Sam Dagher, *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 April 2008

[3] "Transcript: Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on Iraq", *CNN*, 7 April 2008

[4] "Revenge Drives String of Killings in Basra", Joel Brinkley, *The New York Times*, 31 October 2003

[5] RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs), IRQ42228.E, 15 January 2004, Immigration and Refugee Board Canada. There is no further indication of what happened to these offices, but it is perfectly possible that they have continued in existence under the same or another name.

[6] "A Survey of Armed Groups in Iraq", Kathleen Ridolfo, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 4 June 2004 [The URL of this article is no longer valid; a version of the same document can be found on Global Security, but the original reference to Tha'r Allah has been split into a non-descript sentence on Tha'r Allah and a separate entry for 'Vengeance Detachments' containing all the information originally

attributed to Tha'r Allah. The version of the document that I first saw can still be obtained as a PDF from SmallWarsJournal.com. Whilst the original document is dated 4 June 2004, the PDF was created on 11 June 2005, which may suggest that the document was altered after that date – ULR: <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/iraqsurvey.pdf>]

[7] “Al-Qaeda scare has Basra on edge”, Omar Hasan, *IOL*, 12 November 2003

[8] “Revenge killings thin ex-Baathists' ranks”, Joel Brinkley, *New York Times*, November 1, 2003

[9] The first reference to a Death Car was made by Steven Vincent, a freelance American reporter, who wrote in August 2005 that a white Toyota Mark II was used by off-duty police officers in the pay of extremist religious group to perpetrate many of the 100s of assassinations in Basra each month (“Switched Off in Basra”, 31 July 2005). Shortly after Vincent’s highly critical report of British ‘negligence’ was published, Vincent was himself snatched by gunmen in a police vehicle and subsequently murdered. References to this and another make of car associated with death squad killings in Basra were made by an eye witness who linked them with the department of Internal Affairs (see endnote 46).

[10] “Human rights protection and promotion vital in the transition period”, Amnesty International, 28 June 2004.

[11] “Iraqi Secret Police Operating in al-Basrah”, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 30 January 2004

[12] This glib comment was made by Capt Shay Marks, a British military spokesman. “Iraqi Party Goes From Exiled to Electable”, Anthony Shadid, *Washington Post*, 14 February 2004

[13] Now renamed simply the Simply Islamic Council for Iraq.

[14] *The Calm Before the Storm: The British Experience in Southern Iraq*, Michael Knights and Ed Williams, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 66, February 2007, p15

[15] “Iraqi Secret Police Operating in al-Basrah”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 30 January 2004

[16] “Iraqi Party Goes From Exiled to Electable”, Anthony Shadid, *Washington Post*, February 14, 2004; “Iraqis Battle Gangs in Basra”, Nicholas Blanford, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 March 2004; “Islamic groups’ rise may lead to greater conflict”, Jack Fairweather, *The Telegraph*, 7 April 2004. Incidents of what appeared to be Islamist social cleansing included a number of massacres of street alcohol vendors. When British forces intervened in one such incident on 1 February 2004, killing two of the attackers, they discovered that the ‘militiamen’ included a number of ‘plainclothes police’ that had teamed up with vigilantes; a British army spokesman, Shay Marks, insisted that the soldiers had stumbled upon a plainclothes police operation cracking down on a criminal gang (“Killings of Vendors in Iraqi City Drive Alcohol Sales Off Streets”, Edward Wong, *The New York Times*, 18 February 2004).

[17] “Iraqis battle gangs in Basra”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 March 2004.

[18] *ibid.*

[19] The headquarters may well have been the offices of a women’s rights organisation, said to have been taken over by Tha’r Allah in a later report; the women were threatened with death if they returned. “The Roots of Iraqi Secularism”, Healing Iraq, 12 October 2004 – URL: http://healingiraq.blogspot.com/archives/2004_10_01_healingiraq_archive.html

[20] A Weekly Review of Developments in and Pertaining to Iraq, 2 April 2004, Volume 7, Number 12, RADIO FREE EUROPE/ RADIO LIBERTY; “One American killed in al-Falouja; Annan: work is underway to form a multinational force”, ArabicNews.com, 3/30/2004 – URL: <http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/040330/2004033012.html>

[21] “Islamic groups’ rise may lead to greater conflict”, Jack Fairweather, *The Telegraph*, 7 April 2004

[22] “Killings of civilians in Basra and al-‘Amara”, Amnesty International, 11 May 2004

[23] “Iraq: our fatal blunder”, Stephen Grey, *New Statesman*, 3 October 2005”; some further observations were published by Stephen Grey in an internet photo diary now removed from the web.

[24] “In Basra, Militia Controls by Fear”, Richard A Oppel Jr, *The New York Times*, 9 October 2005

[25] *The Calm Before the Storm: The British Experience in Southern Iraq*, Michael Knights and Ed Williams, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 66, February 2007, p29

[26] “Rule of the death squads”, Stephen Grey, *New Statesman*, 15 March 2004

[27] “Officer honoured for Iraq role”, *BBC*, 12 June 2004

[28] “Supervisory Commission to Control Checkpoints”, *Al Sabaah*, 16 January 2005 – URL: <http://horse.he.net/~swiftpow/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=14632&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=60>

[29] In May Britain’s senior police adviser, Deputy Chief Constable Colin Smith, another veteran from Northern Ireland, insisted that he was optimistic and that the ability of the Basra police force to patrol and investigate crimes was an ‘exponential development (“Basra out of control, says chief of police”, Rory Carroll, *The Guardian*, 31 May 2005). As late as September 2005, shortly before the arrest of 2 undercover SAS operatives, Chief Inspector Amanda Cooke, a senior British adviser to the Iraqi police in southern Iraq, absolutely refuted the accusation that the police in Basra had been thoroughly infiltrated by Shiite militiamen and took part in a campaign of assassination: ‘I’m 100 per cent sure that people [at Camp Apache] are working for the common good’ (“Camp Apache, the Iraqi police academy that relies on Britons”, Jonny Beardsall, *The Telegraph*, 22 September 2005).

[30] *The Calm Before the Storm: The British Experience in Southern Iraq*, Michael Knights and Ed

Williams, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 66, February 2007, p27

[31] “Clerics become powerbrokers in the South”, Jack Fairweather, *The Telegraph*, 14 February 2005

[32] “Basra out of control, says chief of police”, Rory Carroll, *The Guardian*, 31 May 2005

[33] The Tactical Support Unit in Basra was the equivalent of the Special Police Commandos and Public Order Brigades deployed elsewhere in Iraq, ie. a high-end, specialist paramilitary counterinsurgency unit tied in closely with intelligence-based operations. See “US Collusion with Iraqi Death Squads”, Max Fuller, Global Research, 26 June 2006 for a detailed description of such units at work.

[34] “After seven British deaths in a week, Basra’s police chief is linked to terrorists”, Oliver Poole, *The Telegraph*, 15 May 2006

[35] In a largely unexplained incident in March 2005, Yusif al Musawi leads a hundreds-strong demonstration against the Danish port operating company Maersk, which had illegally taken control of the important facility of Khor as Zubayr, leading to the company’s eviction. Musawi is alleged to have accused the head of Maersk security of being a Jewish spy who should have been killed a long time ago (“Iraqi Port Weathers Danish Storm”, Lotte Dolke Kaarsholm, Charlotte Aagaard and Osama Al-Habahbeh, CorpWatch, 31 January 2006).

[36] *Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra*, Crisis Group Middle East Report No 67, 25 June 2007, p7

[37] “As British troops exit Basra, Shiites vie to fill power vacuum”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 2007

[38] Whilst the International Crisis Group report (op cit.) claims that Fadhila has attempted to strengthen Basra’s autonomy, perhaps on the basis of a union of three provinces, there is no doubt that the party has opposed the SCIRI-lead scheme for a nine-province federal region and a Fadhila party member, Abu Zaineb al-Edani, claims, ‘We’re the only party that has a national agenda,’ (“Battling for Power in Basra”, Institute of War and Peace Reporting, *ICR No 230*, 7 August 2007). At the same time, Knights and Williams (op cit.) record that the Fadhila governor, under pressure from his backers in the Southern Oil Company and General Union of Oil Employees, has taken a tough line with foreign oil companies and has drafted legislation intended to limit foreign involvement in the oil sector; the ICG report also highlights that Fadhila went so far as to cut off electricity to Baghdad to counter a SCIRI-backed Kurdish drive to open up the oil sector to foreign investment!

[39] “US reporter murdered in Iraq had written his own epitaph”, James Hider, *The Times*, 4 August 2005.

[40] See “Playing with fire”, Ali Rifat, Michael Smith and Richard Woods, *The Sunday Times*, 24 September 2005 for a good example of mainstream reporting of the event; see “Breaking Iraq and

Blaming Iran”, Andrew G Marshall, Global Research, 3 July 2008, for a useful summary of the evidence relating to the event.

[41] Abdel Hadi al-Daraji, said to be Muqtada al Sadr’s top official in Basra, accused Britain of plotting to start an ethnic war by carrying out bombings targeting Shia civilians and then blaming the attacks on Sunni Arab groups (“Shia militia fies up anti-British hatred after SAS rescue”, Adrian Blomfield, *The Telegraph*, 23 September 2005).

[42] According to one source, ‘when the soldiers were eventually moved to another house, the mood of their captors changed and that although their hands remained bound together they were treated quite well before being freed’ (“Captured SAS men ‘spying on drill torturer’”, Sean Rayment, *The Telegraph*, 16 October 2005).

[43] *Special Report: Testimonials Regarding human rights in Basra*, Monitoring of Human Rights in Iraq, 8 April 2006. See also: “Abducted Lawyer in Iraqi Trail Slain”, 22 October 2005; Iraqi Resistance Report, 22 October 2005; the website of Juan Cole, 23 October 2005; “Prime Minister Visits al-Basrah to Assess Situation”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 25 October 2005; “Iraqi Security Forces Close in on Parties Tied to Iran”, *Al Zaman*, 29 October 2005; *Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra*, Crisis Group Middle East Report No 67, 25 June 2007, p13.

[44] One of two cover explanations for the undercover British presence in Basra, as narrated by an ‘inside source’, was that a team of 24 SAS was attempting to prevent bombers entering the city from Iran (“Playing with fire”, Ali Rifat, Michael Smith and Richard Woods, *The Sunday Times*, 24 September 2005), while Blair publicly accused Iran of exporting technology and explosives to guerrillas in Basra shortly after the raid (“Iraq police are among 12 seized by British forces in Basra raid”, Rory Carroll, *The Guardian*, 8 October 2005. A second explanation for the undercover presence – that the SAS was spying on a senior police commander who had been torturing prisoners – was subsequently ‘revealed’ as the ‘real story’ by equally anonymous military sources (“Captured SAS men ‘spying on drill tortureer’”, Sean Rayment, *The Telegraph*, 16 October 2005).

[45] “British investigate Basra torture claims”, Brian Brady, *Scotland on Sunday*, 20 November 2005

[46] “A ‘quagmire’ as violence upsets efforts to reconstitute Iraqi police forces”, Michael Moss, *The New York Times*, 24 May 2006. In an undated episode contained within the testimonials collated by Monitoring of Human Rights in Iraq that may or may not relate to this raid, after one of the so-called death cars had been traced back to Interior Affairs and its occupants arrested, the then Interior Minister Bayan Jabr ordered Governor Waeli to release the car and crew or face the cancellation of the Basra governate and its various entities! There was no outcry in support of the governor to be found in the British or international media.

[47] Each of the six members of this totally corrupt ‘rogue’ unit that tortured prisoners to death with drills that was actually charged was acquitted for ‘lack of evidence’ due to witness intimidation, presumably including Britain’s Special Air Service! (*ibid.*). Maj. Peter Cripps, a British military

spokesman, revealed that the members of Internal Affairs simply 'got jobs in another department' ("Iran-Iraq: Brits Crack Down on Basra's Police", *Associated Press*, 25 January 2006).

[48] Two sets of arrests are recorded, the first of '12 Iraqis, including police officers, who were suspected of involvement in attacks against coalition forces' on 7 October 2005 (ie. Prior to the governor's raid against Thar Allah; "Iraq police are among 12 seized by British forces in Basra raid", Rory Carroll, *The Guardian*, 8 October 2005), and the second of 14 people, including 'influential members of the serious crimes and internal affairs units, including Maj. Jassim al-Daraji, assistant director of Basra's criminal intelligence department, on 24 January 2006 ("British, Danish troops seize police in Iraqi raids" *Reuters*, 24 January 2006; "Iran-Iraq: Brits Crack Down on Basra's Police", *Associated Press*, 25 January 2006). In the first instance, we may guess that these included the six members of Internal Affairs subsequently released, while in the second we are told that nine were immediately released, while five were jailed 'for alleged roles in murder and other crimes'. According to a member of the Basra governing council, the January arrests included 12 intelligence officers, provoking fury from the governor, who intended to issue a resolution to expel the British from the city ("British Forces Arrest 12 Police Officers in Basrah", *Al-Hayat*, 25 January 2006). Bear in mind that it was the governor who actually raided Thar Allah to much consternation, while western analysts insist the Brit were cracking down on Thar Allah cells, but in actual fact appear to have been arresting police presumably loyal to the governor!

[49] "Shiite factional struggles threaten Iraqi stability", *TheHill.com*

[50] "Iraq Blunders 2: co-opting the militia", Adam Smith MP, 23 March 2006.

[51] Fayrouz in Beaumont blog, 14 May 2006; "Forty killed in Iraq carnage", 15 May 2006.

[52] "Terror links cost Basra police chief his job", *Agencies*, 14 May 2006. In Waeli's own words: 'I am astonished at the murders of the past week in Basra, where the police haven't made any kind of investigation'.

[53] *Ibid.*

[54] "As British troops exit Basra, Shiites vie to fill power vacuum", *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 2007. Juan Cole also refers to Thar Allah's role in leading demonstrations in his blog for 16 May 2006.

[55] *The Calm Before the Storm: The British Experience in Southern Iraq*, Michael Knights and Ed Williams, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 66, February 2007, p32

[56] *idid*. P30

[57] *Provincial Politics in Iraq*, Michael Knights and Eamon McCarthy, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 81, April 2008, p5

[58] “Raid frees 17 Iraqis abducted in Baghdad”, John F Burns, *The New York Times*, 23 June 2006

[59] “Iranian Volunteers Set Off for Lebanon”, Brian Murphy, *Associated Press*, 26 July 2006

[60] Andrew G Marshall has suggested that the raid was one of the last in a series of efforts to destroy the evidence related to the activities of the two undercover British servicemen arrested in September 2005 (“Breaking Iraq and Blaming Iran”, Global Research, 3 July 2008). It does seem perfectly likely that the Christmas assault was connected to the ongoing feud with elements of the Iraqi police that had drifted beyond British control, but it is also quite possible that the evidence that they commandeered related much more widely to the operations of the intelligence unit and its paramilitary cohorts, perhaps as part of the process of British withdrawal. An analogous event might be the break into the very secure Castelreagh complex in Northern Ireland, which housed the Special Branch, an interrogation centre and the Force Research Unit, on 17 March 2002. Just three men managed to walk out with files, documents and computerised information relating to the British covert war in Ulster.

[61] “UK troops storm Iraqi police HQ”, *BBC*, 25 December 2006; “British Raid Basra Police Station”, *Associated Press*, 25 December 2006.

[62] Curiously, according to the chief of police of the time, 20 of the most dangerous prisoners accused of planting bombs, apparently vanished with the British raid (“Reduced to rubble ... British troops launch Christmas raid on the ‘station of death’”, Dominic Kennedy and Ned Parker, *The Times*, 26 December 2006.

[63] “British military finds ‘appalling’ Iraqi prison cell”, Marc Santora, *The New York Times*, 26 December 2006

[64] *Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra*, Crisis Group Middle East Report No 67, 25 June 2007, p8; “Horrors that mirrored Saddam’s worst excesses”, Dominic Kennedy and Ned Parker, *The Times*, 26 December 2006

[65] *Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra*, Crisis Group Middle East Report No 67, 25 June 2007, p16

[66] “Battling for Power in Basra”, *ICR No. 230*, Institute of War and Peace Reporting, 7 August 2007

[67] “Militias Compete like ‘Mafia Families’ over Oil Rackets and Public Resources”, 13 August 2007

[68] “As British troops exit Basra, Shiites vie to fill power vacuum”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 2007; “Strong Like Saddam”, Kevin Peraino, *Newsweek*, 9 October 2007

[69] “As British troops exit Basra, Shiites vie to fill power vacuum”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 2007

[70] *Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra*, Crisis Group Middle East Report No 67, 25 June 2007, p7

[71] *ibid.* p8

[72] *ibid.*

[73] “As British troops exit Basra, Shiites vie to fill power vacuum”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 2007

[74] For an intelligent discussion, see “Breaking Iraq and Blaming Iran”, Andrew G Marshall, Global Research, 3 July 2008. For ungrounded speculation that completely misunderstands the relations of US and Iraqi troops and ignores the internal politics of Basra, try “Petraeus hid Maliki's resistance to US troops”, Gareth Porter, *Asia Times*, 19 April 2008. The idea that the Iraqi army could act independently reached farce when it was reported that the US was having to rely on spy satellites to keep tabs on its whereabouts (U.S. spies on Iraqi army, sources say”, Greg Miller, *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 2008).

[75] As former CIA analyst Ray McGovern highlights, with so many embedded US troops within the Iraqi army, it is simply impossible that the Knights Assault could have been undertaken without US consent (“Ex-CIA analyst on Petraeus and Cheney”, *The Real News Network*, 11 April 2008).

[76] “Transcript: Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on Iraq”, *CNN*, 7 April 2008

[77] “Basra Strike Against Shiite Militias Also About Oil”, Sam Dagher, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 9 April 2008

[78] “Militias finished in Iraq's Basra: governor”, Ian Simpson, *Reuters*, 8 July 2008

[79] For instance, in February Michael Wareing, who heads the Basra Development Commission, stated, ‘My sense is that many of the oil companies are very eager to come in now, and what they're actually waiting for is the hydrocarbon law to be passed and various projects to be signed off’, (“Oil giants are poised to move into Basra”, David Smith, *The Observer*, 24 February 2008). See also “Deals With Iraq Are Set to Bring Oil Giants Back”, Andrew E. Kramer, *The New York Times*, 19 June 2008.

[80] *Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra*, Crisis Group Middle East Report No 67, 25 June 2007, p7. It is also interesting to note that as a state of emergency imposed by the central government with its checkpoints and curfews ended in Basra in July 2006, Sunni families reported a wave of new leaflets warning them to flee (“In Basra, state of emergency provides little relief from violence”, Nancy A Youssef, *McClatchy Newspapers*, 4 July 2006).

[81] “A ‘quagmire’ as violence upsets efforts to reconstitute Iraqi police forces”, Michael Moss, *The New York Times*, 24 May 2006

[82] See *Gangs and Counter Gangs and Low Intensity Operations*

[83] *The Guardian*, 14 June 2002

[84] “For God and Ulster’: The Culture of Terror and Loyalist Death Squads in Northern Ireland”, Jeffrey A Sluka. In *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, Jeffrey A Sluka ed., University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000

[85] “Top secret army cell breaks terrorists”, Sean Rayment, *Sunday Telegraph*, 5 February 2007

[86] “For God and Ulster’: The Culture of Terror and Loyalist Death Squads in Northern Ireland”, Jeffrey A Sluka, p135

[87] “Fury as Basra troops appear in pro-UUVF magazine”, Henry McDonald, *The Observer*, September 9 2007