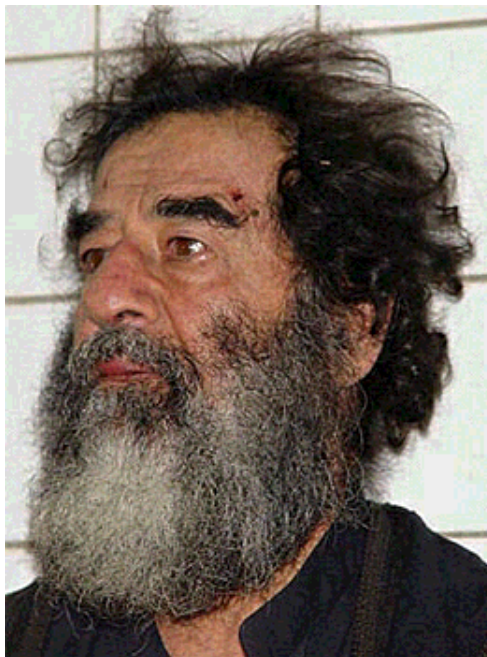


Saddam Hussein Discovered in Hole

by Paul Wolf, 15 December 2003

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From: Paul Wolf <paulwolf@icdc.com>
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Indications Saddam Was Not in Hiding But a Captive DEBKAfile Special Report, 14 December 2003

A number of questions are raised by the incredibly bedraggled, tired and crushed condition of this once savage, dapper and pampered ruler who was discovered in a hole in the ground on Saturday, December 13:

1. The length and state of his hair indicated he had not seen a barber or even had a shampoo for several weeks.
2. The wild state of his beard indicated he had not shaved for the same period.
3. The hole dug in the floor of a cellar in a farm compound near Tikrit was primitive indeed -- 6ft across and 8ft across with minimal sanitary arrangements -- a far cry from his opulent palaces.
4. Saddam looked beaten and hungry.
5. Detained trying to escape were two unidentified men. Left with him were two AK-47 assault guns and a pistol, none of which were used.
6. The hole had only one opening. It was not only camouflaged with mud and bricks -- it was blocked. He could not have climbed out without someone on the outside removing the covering.
7. And most important, \$750,000 in 100-dollar notes were found with him (a pittance for his captors who expected a \$25m reward) -- but no communications equipment of any kind, whether cell phone or even a carrier pigeon for contacting the outside world.



Image of hole with ventilator shaft duct

According to DEBKAfile analysts, these seven anomalies point to one conclusion: **Saddam**

Hussein was not in hiding; he was a prisoner.

After his last audiotaped message was delivered and aired over *al Arabiya* TV on Sunday November 16, on the occasion of Ramadan, Saddam was seized, possibly with the connivance of his own men, and held in that hole in Adwar for three weeks or more, which would have accounted for his appearance and condition. Meanwhile, his captors bargained for the \$25 m prize the Americans promised for information leading to his capture alive or dead. The negotiations were mediated by Jalal Talabani's Kurdish PUK militia.

These circumstances would explain the ex-ruler's docility -- described by Lt.Gen. Ricardo Sanchez as "resignation" -- in the face of his capture by US forces. He must have regarded them as his rescuers and would have greeted them with relief.

From Gen. Sanchez's evasive answers to questions on the \$25m bounty, it may be inferred that the Americans and Kurds took advantage of the negotiations with Saddam's abductors to move in close and capture him on their own account, for three reasons:

- A. His capture had become a matter of national pride for the Americans. No kudos would have been attached to his handover by a local gang of bounty-seekers or criminals. The country would have been swept anew with rumors that the big hero Saddam was again betrayed by the people he trusted, just as in the war.
- B. It was vital to catch his kidnapers unawares so as to make sure Saddam was taken alive. They might well have killed him and demanded the prize for his body. But they made sure he had no means of taking his own life and may have kept him sedated.
- C. During the weeks he is presumed to have been in captivity, guerrilla activity declined markedly -- especially in the Sunni Triangle towns of Falluja, Ramadi and Balad -- while surging outside this flashpoint region -- in Mosul in the north and Najef, Nasseriya and Hilla in the south. It was important for the coalition to lay hands on him before the epicenter of the violence turned back towards Baghdad and the center of the Sunni Triangle.

The next thing to watch now is not just where and when Saddam is brought to justice for countless crimes against his people and humanity -- Sanchez said his interrogation will take 'as long as it takes' -- but what happens to the insurgency. Will it escalate or gradually die down?

An answer to this, according to *DEBKA file*'s counter-terror sources, was received in Washington nine days before Saddam reached US custody.

It came in the form of a disturbing piece of intelligence that the notorious Lebanese terrorist and hostage-taker Imad Mughniyeh, who figures on the most wanted list of 22 men published by the FBI after 9/11, had arrived in southern Iraq and was organizing a new anti-US terror campaign to be launched in March-April 2004, marking the first year of the American invasion.

For the past 21 years, Mughniyeh has waged a war of terror against Americans, whether on behalf of the Hizballah, the Iranian Shi'ite fundamentalists, al Qaeda or for himself. The Lebanese arch-terrorist represents for the anti-American forces in Iraq an ultimate weapon.

Saddam's capture will not turn this offensive aside; it may even bring it forward.

For Israel, there are three lessons to be drawn from the dramatic turn of events in Iraq:

- First, An enemy must be pursued to the end and if necessary taken captive. The Sharon government's conduct of an uncertain, wavering war against the Palestinian terror chief Yasser Arafat stands in stark contrast to the way the Americans have fought Saddam and his cohorts in Iraq and which has brought them impressive gains.
- Second, Israel must join the US in bracing for the decisive round of violence under preparation by Mughniyeh, an old common enemy from the days of Beirut in the 1980s. Only three weeks ago, DEBKA *file*'s military sources reveal, the terrorist mastermind himself was seen in south Lebanon in surveillance of northern Israel in the company of Iranian military officers. With this peril still to be fought, it is meaningless for Israelis to dicker over the Geneva Accord, unilateral steps around the Middle East road map, or even the defensive barrier.
- Third, Certain Israeli pundits and even politicians, influenced by opinion in Europe, declared frequently in recent weeks that the Americans had no hope of capturing Saddam Hussein and were therefore bogged down irretrievably in Iraq. The inference was that the Americans erred in embarking on an unwinnable war in Iraq.

This was wide of the mark even before Saddam was brought in. The Americans are in firm control -- even though they face a tough new adversary -- and the whole purpose of the defeatist argument heard in Israel was to persuade the Sharon government that its position in relation to the Palestinians and Yasser Arafat is as hopeless as that of the Americans in Iraq. Israel's only choice, according to this argument, is to knuckle under to Palestinian demands and give them what they want. Now that the Iraqi ruler is in American custody, they will have to think again.

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Capture has few intel gains

by P. Mitchell Prothero, *UPI*, 14 December 2003

WASHINGTON, Dec. 14 (UPI) -- What's clear from the initial video footage of the capture of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein is that this is not the evil mastermind at the controls of the resistance organizations that continue to harass the U.S.-led coalition.

Thus the immediate benefits enjoyed by the U.S. occupation from his surprisingly meek capture will be psychological in that it proves to the Iraqi people that the brutal despot will not return to power. But little practical or actionable information will come from the arrest to assist U.S. and coalition forces in their hunt for the anti- occupation guerrilla groups.

Found in a 6-foot by 8-foot hole in the basement of a farmhouse in Adwan -- 10 miles outside his hometown of Tikrit -- Saddam had an entourage of two bodyguards, a handful of guns and \$750,000 in U.S. currency. Clearly this was an operation designed to avoid capture by American troops, and not a mobile headquarters unit that has been behind the attacks that have killed hundred of coalition forces and pro-occupation Iraqis.

Although the capture might convince former regime officials, who Iraqi resistance forces say are involved in organizing the attacks, to cooperate with U.S. forces if captured as they no

longer need fear his wrath, it seems unlikely Saddam has any meaningful information on current operations.

The leader of an Iraqi resistance cell interviewed last month by United Press International seemed to have an inconsistent view of Saddam and his role. In several interviews, Abu Mujahid would alternately claim to be a former supporter of Saddam's, while arguing he would not support his return to power. But at other times, he described a resistance organization that had been put into place before the fall of Iraq and was operated by former Baath Party officials.

"We are told that Saddam might be at the top of the organization," he told UPI in late November. "I don't know if I believe that, but my colleague has seen Saddam.

"He comes to tell my colleagues to continue to fight. But we look at him as a strong leader. But we don't want him back."

But that colleague who claimed to have seen Saddam -- it was said at the scene of a roadside bomb attack in October outside the U.S. military base at Baghdad Airport -- also claimed that the former Iraqi leader had not changed his appearance since abandoning his capital in early April.

The initial footage of a gaunt Saddam with wild hair and a long beard after his capture disproves this claim. But even at the time of the interview, Abu Mujahid sounded skeptical that Saddam was brazenly leading the resistance since his ouster.

"I think Saddam is too busy hiding," he said. "I think that the leaders above me are former generals who want to replace Saddam when the Americans leave."

He also made clear that while Baath Party officials -- who he said led the resistance -- might have, at one time, been loyal to Saddam, the invasion of Iraq had convinced many former supporters that though they want the Americans out, Saddam was not a good leader.

"We actually took a vote at a meeting last week," he said during the interview. "If the Americans leave and Saddam comes back, we will fight him too. Maybe if he were elected we'd allow it.

"But no one in Iraq wants Saddam back. He turned into a thief and a murderer who made too many mistakes. We don't want Saddam, but American cannot occupy us any longer."

With initial reports calling Saddam cooperative with his captors there stands to reason this could offer major intelligence benefits for the occupation, even if not in terms of fighting the resistance movements. The biggest benefits will come on two questions that have plagued the Bush administration since the fall of Iraq: What happened to the weapons of mass destruction that everyone was so convinced Saddam possessed, and what of the claims that Saddam's regime had serious working ties to Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida terrorist network.

On the WMD point, Saddam's capture should lead to answers almost immediately. Saddam knows his run is over and any trial he faces at best will lead to life imprisonment. His only

major success in 2003 was the embarrassment of the U.S.-led coalition when the much-discussed biological and chemical weapons were never delivered as promised by the invasion.

For a man with an enormous ego -- facing little chance of survival -- Saddam will be unlikely to resist the urge to brag about either how he deceived the world into believing he posed a threat with his WMD or to brag about how he hid such weapons. So there's little downside for him to cooperate on this issue, which will lead to an intelligence coup for U.S. forces.

On the second point, it seems unlikely he will see much point in cooperating, particularly when an admission of any substantive links to al-Qaida would justify an invasion in the first place. Saddam will have little interest in helping the U.S. justify the invasion on this front, plus there's a considerable chance that no such links existed and that his claims to that effect will be ignored.

However, his capture might lead to Baath officials already in U.S. custody cooperating more enthusiastically with their interrogators and could shed additional light on a host of important issues.

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Saddam not heading insurgency

US says there is little evidence Saddam controlled resistance
Aljazeera.net, 15 December 2003

A US official has conceded that the manner and circumstances of Saddam Hussein's arrest was arrested makes it unlikely he was directing resistance forces in Iraq.

US forces who captured a haggard on Saturday 13 December Saddam found no communications equipment, maps or other evidence of a guerrilla command center at Saddam's hiding place.

"Given the location and circumstances of his capture, it makes it clear that Saddam was not managing the insurgency, and that he had very little control or influence.

"That is significant and disturbing because it means the insurgents are not fighting for Saddam, they're fighting against the United States," said Sen. Jay Rockefeller, the vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

US intelligence officials have previously said they believe Saddam was too concerned with survival and staying hidden to provide much more than symbolic leadership.

Ties to guerilla war

Saddam's interrogators are initially focusing on the former Iraqi president's ties to the guerrilla war, pressing him for intelligence about impending attacks and the locations of

resistance leaders, US officials said Sunday.

Of secondary concern, at the outset, is whether Saddam will answer the many unresolved questions about Iraq's alleged efforts to develop chemical, biological and nuclear weapons and his government's ties to terrorism, the officials said.

"Given the location and circumstances of his capture, it makes it clear that Saddam was not managing the insurgency"

Senator J Rockefeller, Senate Intelligence Committee, Vice chairman

That will be addressed down the road, perhaps when interrogators have established a rapport with Saddam, according to the officials, who spoke only on condition of anonymity.

During Saddam's arrest, US troops discovered "descriptive written material of significant value," one US commander in Iraq told The Associated Press.

Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, the top US military commander in Iraq, described Saddam as talkative and cooperative. Other officials, however, shied away from suggesting he has provided any useful intelligence immediately right away after his capture.

Knowledge

Interrogators' immediate hope is that Saddam will supply a wealth of knowledge on the insurgency against the US-led occupation force and its Iraqi allies, officials said.

It is a race against the clock. His information grows more outdated by the hour, and other leaders from Saddam's toppled government can move or take other steps to avoid capture.

US officials want to know the role and whereabouts of Izzat Ibrahim al-Duri. He is the ex-Revolutionary Command Council vice chairman and longtime Saddam confidant whose family and loyalists are believed to be helping the insurgency.

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Recruits Abandon Iraqi Army

Troubled Training Hurts Key Component of Bush Security Plan
by Ariana Eunjung Cha, *Washington Post*, 13 December 2003

KIRKUSH, Iraq, Dec. 12 -- More than half the men in the first unit to be trained for the new Iraqi army have abandoned their jobs because of low pay, inadequate training, faulty equipment, ethnic tensions and other concerns, leaving the nascent 1st Battalion dramatically understaffed just days before it is scheduled to leave training camp for its first assignment, Iraqi, U.S. and other coalition officials say.

About 480 of the 900 recruits who began training in August have left the U.S.-backed force, according to Australian Maj. Doug Cumming, chief instructor at the training academy in Kirkush, about 60 miles northeast of Baghdad. They will not be punished for leaving, nor are they even being pursued, officials say. Among those who remain, some still have not

mastered such basics as how to march in formation and how to properly respond to radio calls.

On Monday, the 1st Battalion is scheduled to begin assisting the U.S. Army's 4th Infantry Division in running traffic checkpoints and securing defense perimeters around bases in the eastern part of the country. Plans also call for the battalion to move to the northern city of Mosul in mid-February to serve as an independent unit under the command of the 101st Airborne Division.

Creation of the new Iraqi army is a key component of the Bush administration's plan to restore security and to return sovereignty to Iraqis. Establishing a capable military force would also yield domestic benefits for the administration by making it possible to send U.S. and other foreign soldiers home. Congress has allocated \$2 billion in the next year to support the new Iraqi army.

Administrators, instructors and recruits interviewed here at the training camp all agreed that the 1st Battalion's training had been troubled.

"It was a new experience for everyone," said U.S. Army Command Sgt. Maj. Johnny Matlock, who is part of the multinational team overseeing the new army's training. "We had to learn by mistakes."

The first mistake, according to those in charge of the training program, was that the Iraqi soldiers' salaries were too low. Privates earn \$70 a month -- about half the amount paid to the people who fill sandbags around the Baghdad headquarters of the U.S.-led occupation authority, Maj. Gen. Paul Eaton said. For several months, Eaton has been asking for extra money for the soldiers.

The Coalition Provisional Authority says it is reviewing the pay scale for the Iraqi army as well as for other Iraqi security forces. But one official said the authority feels the soldiers' "remuneration package is at least very fair."

Civilians Training Soldiers

Another problem, Eaton said, was that a civilian company was hired to conduct the training rather than the military. The \$48 million contract was awarded to Vinnell Corp. in the spring, when U.S. forces in Iraq were stretched thin and cutting loose several hundred soldiers to oversee the training would have been difficult.

Training was conducted by employees of Vinnell or one of its subcontractors: Military Professional Resources Inc., Science Applications International Corp., Eagle Group International Inc., Omega Training Group and Worldwide Language Resources Inc. Founded in the 1930s, Vinnell was well known in defense circles for its training of the Saudi Arabian National Guard, but it only recently was thrust into the public spotlight when its complex in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, was bombed by terrorists this year.

Eaton said that while he believes Vinnell brought world-class technical expertise to the task, instructors weren't able to impose the regimented discipline of military instructors. The new

Iraqi army needed drill sergeants, he said, but Vinnell personnel were more akin to college professors.

"Soldiers need to train soldiers. You can't ask a civilian to do a soldier's job," Eaton said.

Representatives from Vinnell declined to comment and referred all questions to the military.

Initial plans for creation of the Iraqi army called for civilian contractors to train all 27 battalions. Now, after Vinnell completes its obligation to train nine battalions, military personnel will take over. The U.S. government has decided to award a second contract, for training officers, to the Jordanian military. Remaining battalions will be trained by the Iraqi military, and the total number of troops to be trained before occupation authorities surrender sovereignty has been cut in half, to 20,000, Eaton said.

Shortly after the war ended this spring, Iraq's U.S. civilian administrator, L. Paul Bremer, disbanded the Iraqi army, leaving an estimated 400,000 soldiers without jobs and provoking violent protests in the streets of every major city in the country.

Bremer then ordered creation of a new army, one without ties to ousted president Saddam Hussein and his Baath Party. Recruiting offices opened around the country, and ex-soldiers, farmers, cigarette vendors, construction workers and others signed up.

One recruit was Haitham Ahmed Salman, 33, from Baqubah, north of Baghdad. When he showed up for training 4 1/2 months ago, he said, he was prepared for the brutality of boot camp. Instead, he was surprised to find that the civilian instructors were polite, respectful and even friendly.

The majority of the instructors, who walk around the training base with slate-gray uniforms that look like a cross between hospital scrubs and prison garb, have some military experience, but many had been retired for years. They approached the recruits with an egalitarian philosophy, several trainees said, making do without the formalities of "sir" and "ma'am" and saluting. They encouraged trainees to take time off and relax and watch Sylvester Stallone and Jackie Chan movies.

Salman, who is now a major in command of the 1st Battalion's 4th Company, said this relaxed attitude confused recruits, who often were not punished for arriving late for classes, neglecting assignments or getting into fistfights.

"They taught that military orders work on your mood. You can refuse -- this is freedom and democracy," he said. "But in military life, freedom and democracy should not apply."

When the 1st Battalion graduated on Oct. 4, the unit's Iraqi commander, Lt. Col. Ali Naim Jabbar, and his top deputies concluded that they would need to redo much of the training. For the past few weeks, they have been running the recruits through exercises they remembered from their days in the old Iraqi army.

Meanwhile, Vinnell's trainers have been concentrating on overhauling their program for the 2nd and 3rd battalions. Significant curriculum changes include a reduction in the theory and

other classroom studies by 30 to 40 percent and adding hands-on field exercises focused on such skills as how to conduct a night watch and how to scan an area for danger -- things that had been taught only by textbook examples.

Military personnel are now a more visible part of the training. Iraqi soldiers from the 1st Battalion impose discipline on and serve as mentors to recruits in the 2nd and 3rd battalions, and occupation soldiers make an effort to engage in back-and-forth discussions.

Disunity in Diversity

Another source of tension among 1st Battalion recruits was the forced integration of ethnic Arabs and Kurds, traditional enemies. American planners imagined the new army as a showcase for the country's diversity, and the 1st Battalion was set up to be 60 percent Arab Shiite Muslim, 20 percent Arab Sunni, 10 percent Kurdish Sunni and 10 percent other. About 100 Kurds quit in the first few weeks of training after their tribal leaders objected to the battalion's ethnic mixture.

In addition, because predominantly Kurdish northern Iraq was autonomous from the rest of the country for the past dozen years, many young Kurds don't speak Arabic. During military training, instruction had to be translated from English to Arabic and then to Kurdish.

"I'm not that comfortable in the new army," said Nawar Mahmood, 23, who said he was a member of the Kurdish pesh merga militia and had been reassigned to the new Iraqi army. "I spent 13 years in the pesh merga fighting the Baathists, and now there are many Baathists in the new army."

Among other complaints voiced by the recruits: The soles of the first set of boots they received fell off. Their uniforms -- an odd mix of pink, brown and green that is supposed to resemble camouflage -- are falling apart. Their weapons jam when they try to fire them -- although U.S. troops who have tested them say they work fine.

"Soldiers want to be elegant when they go out, but you see our funny clothes," Salman said. "The men ask me, 'Are we really going out in these clothes?' Every time you wash them they get smaller, so I have gone a month without washing them."

Eaton said he, too, is frustrated about the quality of the equipment. One reason, he said, is that the coalition authority is buying the gear with seized Iraqi assets, which can only be spent through contracts with Iraqi companies.

Cumming, the chief instructor, said he worries that some of his recruits can't pay their rent with their salaries and that, because they agonize over the welfare of their families, they want life insurance. Eaton said his team is working on a plan to introduce health coverage and other benefits for troops and to create housing for their families on bases, but he acknowledges it is unlikely this will happen soon.

Cumming said fair compensation for Iraqi soldiers would be equal to what Iraqi police receive -- \$120 a month -- plus something extra, because soldiers are asked to live away from home.

"Get a bureaucrat and take him away from home and stick him in this camp and make him run around a bit, and then ask him what's fair," Cumming said.

For about a week, members of the Army's 4th Infantry Division have been running the 1st Battalion's remaining troops through some simulated missions. Capt. William Hansen of Fairfax and Staff Sgt. Donald Coleman from Arlington are advising Salman's 4th Company.

On Friday, the 4th Company's goal was to set up a mock ambush point, stop a convoy and capture or kill the enemy. The trainees hoisted their guns, swarmed the road, and within a few minutes they had successfully neutralized their target. Or so they thought.

Hansen called the privates over to assess their performance. He was less than thrilled. The men should have camouflaged their helmets with leaves and branches, he said, before they advanced to the side of the road. They should have been moving discreetly in twos, not in long lines. And they should have gotten around the vehicle faster, to take advantage of the element of surprise during the critical first 15 seconds.

Not everyone was listening. Some soldiers fidgeted and began talking among themselves. "Hey!" Hansen yelled, pointing at his chest. "Everyone with less rank than me pays attention to me, okay?"

Salman closed his eyes and sighed.

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New battlelines drawn in the Iraqi sand

by Marc Erikson, *The Asia Times*, 12 December 2003

Emulating his boss's Thanksgiving Day venture, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld sneaked into Iraq last weekend and promised on Coalition Provisional Authority's al-Iraqiya TV that the American military would fight on in Iraq until Saddam Hussein's reign of "terror" is history.

Of course, he had said back in May that it **was** history. But let that be. What's of concern now is how things will play out in the immediate period ahead and in the runup to the end of June next year when the US has said it will turn over sovereignty to Iraqi authorities. On present and the past several months' performance, the handover may have to take place under conditions in which Ba'ath Party and foreign jihadi resistance remain far from being uprooted. A continued large-scale US military presence -- well beyond Rumsfeld's likely expectations as to size and duration -- may be required to keep any new government in power.

I don't know the latest body count, though it now exceeds 190 Americans killed by hostile fire since US President George W Bush declared an end to major combat operations on May 1. I have no reason to doubt US military commanders' assertions that daily attacks on US forces personnel have diminished somewhat since mid- November, when a new strategy of pro-active "search and destroy" missions and fortification of American positions and

convoys was adopted. What's worrying from a strategic perspective is that -- also since mid-November -- 19 Italian, seven Spanish, two Japanese, two South Korean and a Colombian member of the US-led coalition have lost their lives in precisely targeted guerrilla attacks. The pattern indicates degrees of centralized planning and intelligence, control and communications capabilities by anti-coalition militants hitherto assumed not to exist: As Americans become hardened targets and more aggressively take the fight to the enemy, the guerrillas switch to militarily softer targets, but of potentially higher political impact and payback.

That by itself is not all that surprising. The Italian compound in the southern city of Nassiriya may have been a soft target of opportunity for a suicide car bombing attack, much like the United Nations headquarters building in Baghdad. But scoping out the movements of Spanish intelligence agents or Japanese diplomats, traveling in unmarked vehicles at times and to places not exactly pre-announced with public fanfare, and ambushing them at pre-arranged locations are other matters entirely. They point to longer-term intelligence penetration of the affected coalition allies' plans and communications, significant logistics capabilities, well-qualified manpower, and political savvy. None of the perpetrators have been caught.

So, who are these guys? Who pays, equips and runs them? Who develops the plans and initiates their well-timed execution to maximum political effect? Not a man or group of men constantly on the run, hiding in one village one night, another the next, always just a few steps ahead of his/their would-be captors. Not Saddam, then. Alternatively, not a Saddam in the dire straits reported. I don't put much store in claims by tribal leaders introduced by go-betweens telling journalists that Saddam is in good health, living in the west of Iraq, and commanding military operations against American forces. Maybe; maybe not. It matters politically. Operationally, it is of secondary significance. What appears certain is that there exist primary and several secondary control centers planning attacks and deploying at least a hundred independently operating guerrilla units of two dozen or so members each. The controllers also arrange for logistics (weapons, communications gear, etc) and have developed a well-functioning intelligence network. The mastermind could be Saddam; but more likely he is the figurehead, carefully kept out of harm's way and protected for his political-symbolic value.

It is estimated by Middle East intelligence services sources that the guerrilla core units' head count is about 2,000. In addition, there exist hundreds of more loosely organized "freelance" units with several thousand members, for a grand total of 4,000-5,000 fighters. In their new pro-active stance, US forces have over the past several weeks killed or captured over 600 guerrillas, but the intelligence gleaned from prisoners has been sparse. The core units carrying out the most high-profile attacks have largely evaded capture and hide well in and behind the "noise" created by the freelancers and sympathizers.

I have described the core outfits' strategy of going after softer coalition targets when the going got tougher against the Americans, who are now moving in larger convoys, new, harder combat vehicles ("Stryker"), and with protective air cover -- and have gone on the offensive employing such Israeli counterinsurgency tactics as enclosing whole villages in razor wire. A more ominous strategic shift of future portent by the insurgents observed recently is their geographical expansion of operations well beyond the Sunni triangle (from

Tikrit down to Baghdad and points west) into mixed Sunni-Kurdish areas around Kirkuk and Mosul, and Shi'ite areas south of Baghdad. Not fighting the Americans head-on where they are strongest is the military logic. The political concern is one of being boxed in and ultimately having to face not just the Americans, but the two-thirds of the Iraqi population growing increasingly hostile to the guerrillas' methods and political aims.

The next three months will likely prove crucial in this regard. Should the insurgents be capable of extending their reach well beyond their Sunni home ground and be able to score military successes and political points in the south and northeast, their influence and longer-term threat potential would grow. Should they fail in that endeavor, one would have to place one's bets on Coalition Provisional Authority boss L Paul Bremer and Rumsfeld. Both sides' strategic plans have come into clearer focus. The outcome remains in doubt.

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. . . . and Israel's "Dirty War"

by Richard Whalen, *The Whalen Report*, December 15, 2003

As the Bush Administration realized its policy in Iraq was failing last summer, administrator L. Paul Bremer personally laid out the discouraging details for President Bush in a briefing at his Texas ranch. The result was the decision to shift bureaucratic oversight responsibility from the Defense Department to the National Security Council staff and the State Department.

Forced into retreat, the Pentagon's leadership opened a new front, and strongly advocated that the White House seek counsel and assistance from trusted mutual friends in Israel. This advice is now being implemented. It amounts to making the failing, undermanned U.S. occupation in Iraq tragically worse by launching within it a secret war of assassination a "dirty war."

According to Seymour Hersh in the *New Yorker* (December 12th), the Bush Administration has authorized "a major escalation of the Special Forces covert war in Iraq." A new Special Force group, designated Task Force 121, is being assembled and trained in Fort Bragg, North Carolina. According to *The New Yorker* and Reuters, Israeli urban warfare commandos will serve as secret advisers to Task Force 121 "assassination teams," targeting Iraqi Baathist party leaders. (Fort Bragg denies having any Israeli visitors.)

"The Americans now realize their forces are in Iraq for the long haul, and are reorganizing accordingly," a senior Israeli security source told Reuters (December 10th). "Israel has been providing advice on how to shift from a reliance on heavy, armored occupation troops to mobile forces that are more effective in quelling urban resistance and cause less friction with the general populace." U.S. forces are being trained to imitate harsh population control measures used against the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza by the Israeli Defense Force (IDF), such as strict curfews, razing buildings suspected of harboring terrorists, arresting and detaining suspects' relatives, and using trained dogs to sniff out explosives.

The obvious questions: what is such Israeli advice worth? And what is its cost? The

Baltimore Sun (December 10th) comments: "The hope is that elite assassination squads will do a better job of ferreting out their foes, while minimizing civilian casualties, than an armored division can do, even if it doesn't win any hearts and minds. It seems reasonable, because it actually comes closer to police work than to warfare". There are just two problems: identification with Israel is fatal to the American cause in Iraq and throughout the Middle East". It's difficult to argue that Israeli policies in the West Bank and Gaza have been paying off. The Intifada continues. Peace seems remote at best. And world opinion has turned strongly against Israel.

"Surely, Pentagon planners recognize the risks inherent in their new course. The clear implication is that they have lost faith in the previous occupation policies. It is worth noting that another major shift is going on: finally, belatedly the State Department has started sending virtually all available Arabic speakers to Iraq. They no longer need to get political (meaning neoconservative) clearance. The aim is to get Americans into the country who might actually be able to get a sense of what is going on there."

Well, of course. Please remember only the tragic, bloody failure of the first seven months of the U.S. occupation of Iraq, controlled in every detail by the Pentagon, has enabled the State Department to force these changes. What could secretly happen next is easily imagined: the Israelis and the neocons could try to exploit their last chance to "neuter Iraq", brutally crushing real and imagined enemies, deliberately dirtying the Americans of Task Force 121 and other Special Forces units. A six-month spree of secret Israeli-inspired assassinations, special detentions and other kidnappings, mass arrests, special detentions and other anti-population measures could permanently embitter Iraqis against the stupid uncaring Americans.

Essentially, the U.S. Army is secretly committing itself to a massive unaccountable strategy of "manhunts" to be staged against Iraqi insurgents, conducted by Israeli-American "hunter-killer teams." These teams will be tasked with secretly tracking down and killing guerrilla leaders in Iraq and foreign fighters attempting to cross the Syrian border with Iraq.

The potential scale of these operations is mind-boggling and so is their near-total secrecy. A recent Congressional study put the number of active and reserve Special Forces troops at 47,000, with 2004 Pentagon budget of more than \$6.5 billion, up 34 percent from 2003. The President can mobilize and deploy the Special Forces without notifying Congress. Their numbers in-country overseas are not generally included in troop totals. They are secret, invisible and non-accountable. Says a former CIA officer: "When Special Forces target the Baathists, it's technically not assassination it's normal combat operations."

The key U.S. problem in Iraq is to develop quickly accurate sources of timely information intelligence. The plan is to assemble teams drawn from the upper ranks of the old Iraqi intelligence services and train them to penetrate the insurgency. These infiltrators will provide information about individual insurgents for the Americans to act on. The problem: Saddam had excellent security, lousy intelligence. Says an American adviser to the civilian authority in Baghdad: "The only way we can win is to go unconventional. We're going to have to play their game. Guerrilla versus guerrilla. Terrorism versus terrorism. We've got to scare the Iraqis into submission. "Americans see obvious problems e.g., some Iraqis will inform on others to settle grudges. "We'll have to keep them on a short leash."

Another, more experienced Pentagon adviser, an expert on unconventional war, believes the Israelis have oversold themselves and their concept. "We're a democratic society, and we don't fight terror with terror. There will be a lot of close controls do's and don'ts and rules of engagement. The problem is that we've not penetrated the bad guys. The Baath Party is run like a cell system. It's like penetrating the Vietcong we never could do it."

The Israelis are said to specialize in "targeted killing," and have been so successful in the West Bank, killing and capturing so many mid-rank operatives, that Hamas now consists largely of isolated cells that carry out anti-Israel terrorist attacks on their own. They're telling the Americans don't eliminate the center. You want to maintain a network, assassinate or capture the people who recruit and run suicide bombers, as well as the bombers. "The key is not to have freelancers out there" outside any network.

An Army intelligence veteran and Arabic-speaking Mideast expert, Colonel Pat Lang, has watched the Israelis close up and worked closely with them. He is deeply skeptical: "In pursuit of their doctrine of maximum force, retaliation, intimidation of populations and 'banning,' the Israelis have killed a great many of their enemies. Among the Palestinians, blood has flowed freely in the Holy Land, but unfortunately, it has won them nothing. They are no closer to their goal of a safe and completely secure Israel now than they were at the time of Israel's independence in 1948. This is an example that we want to follow . . ."

According to Newsweek (December 5th), Osama bin Laden, who is still calling the shots in Afghanistan, is so unconcerned about American-Israeli cooperation that he wants to shift men and resources massively to Iraq. He reportedly sent three senior Qaeda representatives to a meeting last month with two top Taliban leaders in remote Khost Province near the Pakistan border and informed them that their monthly stipend would be cut in half (to \$1.5 million). Bin Laden wants to greatly increase the Jihadits entering Iraq this winter. His representatives quoted him as saying: "The spilling of American blood is easy in Iraq. The Americans are drowning in deep, rising water."

Why is Bin Laden so confident? He has seen the U.S. occupation of Iraq fail, and now embrace Israel as its model. He is impatient for a great victory over the "Zionists and crusaders," timed to impose maximum political hurt and humiliation on Bush in 2004.

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