

# Death Squads for Iraq

by Paul Wolf, 10 December 2003

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## Introduction

The idea of conducting a classic "counterinsurgency" campaign in Iraq is grossly misguided. It will turn the entire population of the country against the United States. We've made this mistake over and over again in our history, ignoring the popular support for the insurgents. The theory is that by killing the leaders, the insurgency will dissolve and people will be afraid to support it. However, what the IDF and the rest of the terrorism experts in the world seem to misunderstand is basic human nature, and the reasons why there are wars. Wars are driven by revenge and fear. The Israelis' hard-headed approach doesn't work because it ignores the psychology of the Palestinians. They are obviously not discouraged and seem to have become even more determined.

Of course, Israel is not alone in promoting a concept that was totally discredited in the 1960s, as the Alliance for Progress. President Kennedy was determined to combat communist subversion around the world, and believed he had the tools to do it. Assassination was at the top of the list, although it was not called that. The programs are described by Michael McClintock in *Instruments of Statecraft*. Here is an excerpt from one of his other books about Central America, *The American Connection*:

The routine practice of terrorism -- or counter-terrorism -- at the service of the state came to dominate the application of counterinsurgency doctrine in Central America. In practice, the reformist components of counter-insurgency theory were largely cosmetic. Great importance was given to the ground level application of both counter-organization and counter-terror which, including selective assassination on a large scale, was considered expedient and legitimate. It was

justified both on the grounds that it was employed by the guerrillas, and on the quasi-moral grounds that it was a short-term tactic designed to end a conflict as rapidly as possible. In the long run it was expected to save lives.

Counter-insurgent terrorism in practice, however, proved not to be short term, and neither a simple nor particularly low cost answer to insurgency. Easy to start, it was difficult to stop and impossible to moderate; even a minimum of terrorism tended to escalate.

One of the principal arguments of this book is that prolonged state terrorism in Central America, as elsewhere, provokes and sustains mass resistance.

- Paul

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### **Israel trains U.S. assassination squads in Iraq**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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## **Israel helping train U.S. forces to combat Iraqi insurgents**

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

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

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

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

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

### **U.S. forces already have adopted IDF tactics**

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

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

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

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

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

*The Guardian* reported that Israeli security officials went to Iraq to advise American troops there. "Some Israelis went to Iraq as well, not to do training, but for providing

consultations," an American intelligence source told the newspaper.

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

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

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

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

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

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### **West Bank of the Tigris**

*The Baltimore Sun*, 10 December 2003

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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### **Army: No Israeli trainers at Bragg**

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

### **International flavor**

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

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

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

Bush said assassination is not part of that training.

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

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