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Iraq: The Genocide Option

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It was claimed early in 2005 that the United States was considering resort to what has been called the "Salvadoran Option" in Iraq, in which, as had been done in El Salvador in the 1980s, U.S. Special Forces would train paramilitary squads to hunt down and assassinate rebel leaders and their supporters. [1] A year earlier, it was reported that a sizable fund had been appropriated for the creation of an exile-based paramilitary unit for Iraq, and that the money would more broadly "support U.S. efforts to create a lethal, and revengeful Iraqi security force." It was expected that this would lead to "a wave of extrajudicial killings" of armed rebels, but also of "nationalists, other opponents of the U.S. occupation and thousands of civilian Baathists." [2]

<http://divergences.be/sites/divergences.be/local/cache-vignettes/L236xH375/12-4-87acd.jpg>

The rise of the death rate in Iraq, and the evidence of large-scale assassinations and slaughters frequently carried out by uniformed men, suggests that the Salvadoran option was put in place and that it has done its work well even if failing to bring victory to the Shiite leaders and militias and their sponsors.

However, along with the Salvadoran option the U.S. military had also stepped up its own activities in one of a series of "surges," among them the assault on Fallujah in November 2004, and using the Fallujah model, with the application of massive firepower in Sunni-dominated areas, much of it from the air, moving from town to town, in an effort to kill Sunni resistance fighters and render their home bases unusable. Because of the lavish use of firepower and limited concern with Iraqi civilian casualties, this process is very costly to civilians in the area of attack. Civilians also suffer from the fact that the invading troops not only don't speak their language, but become extra hostile as they suffer casualties from a resistance that lives among the local population. This results in greater ruthlessness and increasing numbers of cases of literal direct mass murder as in Haditha. [3]

This is reminiscent of U.S. policy during the Vietnam war, where torture and multiple Haditha-type massacres, enormous firepower, napalm, B-52 bombing raids, and chemical warfare applied to jungles and peasant farms, ravaged the country, leaving much of it a wasteland, killing several million civilians, and leaving a heritage of traumatized, injured and chemically damaged people as well.

It is important to understand that the most violent warfare, including My Lai and its many many look-alikes, as well as the use of napalm and dioxin-based herbicides, was applied in the southern part of the country, which the United States was allegedly "protecting" from an invasion from the north. The methods of warfare themselves demonstrated that the alleged protection and "saving" was a lie, but it should be recognized that the reason these horrors could be applied more lavishly in the south rather than the north is that the south was controlled by the U.S. occupation and its puppet government, so that, unlike North Vietnam, the terrible violence wrought against the southern peasantry could be relatively hidden and kept from public and international scrutiny.

The U.S. attack on Vietnam may be termed the "Genocide Option," as the killing and destruction went far beyond anything that took place in El Salvador, and threatened the survival of the southern population. Southern Vietnam had its U.S.-organized death squads, with Operation Phoenix famously accounting for possibly 40,000 assassinations of NLF cadres and unknown other victims of this murder program.

El Salvador also had impressive death squads, but couldn't match the scope and intensity of the violence wrought by the United States on the distant peasant society, which brought into play all weapons in the U.S. high-tech arsenal short of the nuclear-many being tested against live experimental victimsâ€”used in enormous volume, without moral restraint (and with minimal protest from the "international community").

By 1967 the level of violence had reached a point where Vietnam scholar Bernard Fall warned that "Vietnam as a cultural and historic entity...is threatened with extinction...[as]...the countryside literally dies under the blows of the largest military machine ever unleashed on an area of this size." [4] In the south, 9,000 out of 15,000 hamlets were damaged or destroyed, along with some 25 million acres of farmland and 12 million acres of forests. One and a half million cattle were killed, and the war left a million widows and 800,000 orphans. The chemical defoliation operations were vast and their effects could take many generations to reverse, and they resulted in a further generation of malformed children (500,000 in one 1997 estimate). [5]

This was a truly genocidal attack, both in volume and threat to viability and with its demand that the resistance surrender as the condition for termination of the assault. (In a marvel of transference, the oft-expressed U.S. position was that the refusal to surrender demonstrated a low Vietnamese valuation of Vietnamese life! In a further marvel of Western impudence, the Krstic decision by the NATO-organized Yugoslavia tribunal found that "genocide" had been committed by a NATO target group [Bosnian Serbs] because killingsâ€"which explicitly spared women and childrenâ€"might have ended the viability of a single small town in Bosnia.)

Another feature of the Vietnam War of relevance today is that all through its murderous course it was argued in the United States that it must go on in order to avoid a post-occupation "bloodbath"! The huge ongoing and genocidal bloodbath was needed to prevent a hypothetical one that never did materialize. [6]

The genocide option threatens Iraq, where the United States is engaged in direct military action against another virtually defenceless population-in contrast with El Salvador where proxies did the dirty work. Military technology has advanced further, and the complete amorality of the Deciders and their willingness to kill without limit to achieve their goals or save face is clear. It is important for the Deciders that not too many U.S. service personnel be killed, as this has a definite negative effect on the national willingness to move forward to "victory" (or at least temporarily fending off acknowledging defeat). If U.S. casualties can be reduced by more intensive firepower, at the expense of greater Iraqi civilian casualties, that has been and will continue to be the route taken. Furthermore, U.S. pacification violence applied to Sunni-dominated towns is implemented out of sight of the mainstream media (although not completely hidden given the bravery of some non-imbedded Western journalists and Al Jazeera).

The Bush "surge" is a desperation maneuver, and in a context of ever-stronger political objections to more U.S. personnel in Iraq and sensitivity to U.S. casualties, there is good reason to believe that the Bush answer will be even more intensive firepower in Baghdad and other cities and villages in which the insurgents mingle easily with the civilian population. Bush even warns U.S. citizens of more blood and gore "even if our new strategy works exactly as planned." Furthermore, partly via the use of the Salvadoran Option and partly by U.S. manipulation of sectarian conflict, [7] the invasion-occupation has produced a deadly civil war in which the Sunnis and Shiites engage in large-scale communal ethnic cleansing and killing, adding to the toll.

There can be little doubt that the rate of civilian killing in Iraq is about to rise from something like the recent Lancet estimate of 655,000 to a larger figure. If "genocide" was committed in Bosnia, where recent establishment analysts concludedâ€"embarrassingly, given the earlier institutionalized total of 250,000â€"that approximately 100,000 people died on all sides, including military personnel [8] surely we have a case of genocide in Iraq just during the period 2003-2006. And Bush is about to give us more, with the Democrats and UN looking on but doing nothing to restrain the killing machine.

Wouldn't it be nice if democracy worked and a popular antiwar vote had some effect? And if the global double standard now in force was not so gross and the perpetrators responsible for this genocidal outburst could be brought before a real tribunal in the interest of real global justice before their next surge?

[1] Michael Hirsh and John Barry, "'The Salvadoran Option'," *Newsweek*, January 14, 2005.

[2] Quoted in Craig Murrar, "Civil War in Iraq: The Salvadoran Option and US/UK Policy," <http://www.uruknet.org.uk/?s1=1&p=27587&s2=20>.

[3] Tom Engelhardt, "Collateral Damage: the 'Incident' at Haditha" ; Chris Floyd, "Lesson Plan" ; Linda Heard, "Media and Tal Afar" ; Ghali Hassan, "Iraq: A Criminal Process," *Global Research*, Nov. 27, 2005.

[4] Bernard Fall, *Last Reflections on a War* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

[5] Peter Waldman, "Body Counts: In Vietnam, the Agony of Birth Defects Calls an Old War to Mind," *Wall Street Journal*, Dec. 12, 1970.

[6] Gareth Porter, "The Bloodbath We Created"

[7] Ibid

[8] See Ewa Tabeau and Jakub Bijak, "[War-related Deaths in the 1992-1995 Armed Conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Critique of Previous Estimates and Recent Results](#)," *European Journal of Population*, Vol. 21, No. 2-3, June, 2005, pp. 187-215. . Also see the ongoing work of Mirsad Tokaca et al. at the Sarajevo-based Research and Documentation Center, which produces month-by-month updates of the latest estimates for deaths attributable to the war on the webpage "[The Status of Database by the Centers](#)," Fear of Shia death squads, perhaps secretly controlled by the Badr Brigade, the leading Shia militia, frightens the Sunni. The patience of the Shia is wearing very thin. But their leaders want them to consolidate their strength within the government after their election victory in January.