

US army bulldozes Iraqi farms

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An October 12 report by Patrick Cockburn in *The Independent* draws attention to how US soldiers in Iraq bulldozed groves of date palms and orange and lemon trees in central Iraq as part of a new policy of collective punishment of farmers who refuse to inform on guerrillas attacking US troops.

The action taken last month beside the road at Dhuluaya, a small town 50 miles north of Baghdad, destroyed the livelihood of 32 farmers and their families.

The children of one woman who owned some fruit trees lay down in front of a bulldozer but were dragged away, according to eyewitnesses. When a reporter from *Iraq Today* attempted to take a photograph of the bulldozers at work a soldier grabbed his camera and tried to smash it. One farmer told Cockburn, “They made a sort of joke against us by playing jazz music while they were cutting down the trees.”

Sheikh Hussein Ali Saleh al-Jabouri was a member of a delegation that went to the nearby US base to ask for compensation for the loss of the fruit trees. He said US officers described what had happened as “a punishment of local people because ‘you know who is in the resistance and do not tell us’.”

A petition to the US Army demanding compensation reads, “Tens of poor families depend completely on earning their life on these orchards and now they became very poor and have nothing and waiting for hunger and death.”

The parallels between what the US army is now doing in Iraq and the actions carried out on an almost daily basis by the Israeli occupation forces in the West bank and Gaza Strip are all too obvious. The deliberate destruction of Palestinian agricultural capabilities is one of Israel’s favoured methods of collective punishment and well in excess of 400,000 olive, citrus and almond trees have been uprooted by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF).

The same methods have also been used to destroy close to 1,500 Palestinian homes in the Gaza Strip alone—making around 10,000 people homeless. One can only speculate as to how long it will be before the US follows Israel’s example here also. But what is certain is that the US has indeed taken to heart the advice and training offered by its Middle Eastern proxy on how best to impose a military

occupation on a hostile populace.

Israeli collaboration and involvement in the US war against Iraq is one of the worst kept secrets of recent years. All the parties involved—including the Arab regimes that have lent support to the Bush administration—wish to downplay or conceal Israel’s role because of the fear that it will antagonise broad layers of the Middle East population. But there have been a number of reports detailing Israel’s role over the past years.

As early as January, 2001, the Hebrew weekly *Kol Ha’Ir* reported that Israeli special forces commandos have been training with US Marine snipers serving with the Mediterranean-based Sixth Fleet in urban warfare techniques, in an exercise on capturing Palestinian areas.

The US-based Rand think-tank, which specialises in national security research, held its Arroyo Urban Operations Team annual conference from February 11 to 14, 2002, in Haifa, Israel. Its partners were the University of Haifa National Security Studies Center and the United States Marine Corps Non-Lethal Weapons and Urban Warfare Program. Israeli speakers included retired Brigadier General Gideon Avidor, former commander Major General Eitan Ben-Eliyahu, current Head of Helicopter Operations Brigadier General Shlomo Mashiah of the Israeli Air Force, Israel’s former Home Front commander, Major General Gabriel Ofir, the Israeli Defence Force’s (IDF) Head of Doctrine Brigadier General Gershon HaCohen, and the Commanding General of IDF Military Colleges, Major General Yaacov Amidror.

USA Today reported on November 3, 2002 that Israel was secretly playing a key role in US preparations for war with Iraq, helping to train soldiers and Marines for urban warfare, conducting clandestine surveillance missions in the western Iraqi desert and allowing the United States to place combat supplies in Israel.

The newspaper explained, “Israeli infantry units with experience in urban warfare during the Palestinian uprising helped train US Army and Marine counterparts this summer and fall for possible urban battles in Iraq, a foreign defence official says. The Israelis have built two mock cities, complete with mosques, hanging laundry and even the odd

donkey meandering down dusty streets. A defence official said the sites far surpass US facilities.”

An Israeli official was quoted as saying, “The Americans have asked us to keep a low profile, and we accept that.”

The *World Tribune* of June 6, 2002 noted that the US military was particularly keen on making a study of the Israeli offensive against the West Bank city of Jenin in April 2002, as part of an assimilation of the lessons of Operation Defensive Shield, the Israeli term for the month-long offensive against Palestinian insurgents in the West Bank. The Marine Corps Warfighting Lab said that it intended to revise the corps’ urban warfare doctrine after an examination of Israeli tactics.

Another report in *The Independent* of March 29, 2003 by Justin Huggler drew attention to the ongoing examination of Jenin by the US military. It quoted Martin van Creveld, a professor of military history and strategy at Jerusalem’s Hebrew University, telling reporters that, following his advice to US Marines, the American military bought nine of the converted D9 military bulldozers used in the Jenin demolitions. He said that he gave advice to marines last year in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina and told them, “the giant D9 bulldozers, manufactured for civilian use in the US but fitted with armour-plating in Israel, were among the most useful weapons.”

Huggler also notes: “Israeli use of the bulldozers has not been limited to clearing the way for tanks. They have also been used in collective punishment, such as the destruction of an entire neighbourhood in Jenin after the fighting ended.”

The attraction of the IDF operation in Jenin for the US military is a chilling warning of what is yet to come in Iraq. A Human Rights Watch report on the Israeli attack on Jenin charged the IDF with committing war crimes and established that at least 52 Palestinians were killed, of which 22 were civilians. Of particular significance is the use of bulldozers, missile and tank fire to destroy civilian homes as a form of collective punishment. At least 140 buildings—most of them multifamily dwellings—were destroyed and another 200 rendered unsafe. Some 4,000 people have been displaced. Serious damage was also done to the water, sewage and electrical infrastructure of the camp.

No one knows definitively how many people died at Jenin, thanks largely to the cowardice and capitulation of the United Nations in the face of Israel’s threats and refusal to allow its investigators in. What is known is that atrocities took place, such as the use of human shields, extra-judicial killings, the shooting of a Palestinian nurse tending a wounded man, the shooting of a 14-year-old boy while he was shopping and the killing of a crippled man as he tried to wheel himself up the road in his wheelchair.

The dead at Jenin were only a small part of the estimated 497 Palestinian casualties during Operation Defensive Shield between March 1 and May 7, 2002.

There is a well-known saying, “What goes around comes around”, and this is certainly true of the implications of the decades of US backing for Israeli aggression against the Palestinians. What was carried out by the Zionist regime with Washington’s consent has turned out to be a dry run for what must inevitably become even worse atrocities by the US in occupied Iraq and other countries throughout the world, including the violation of civil rights in the United States itself.

The similarity of techniques utilised by both regimes reflects more than just collaboration, however. It is bound up with the oppressive nature of the military action in both Iraq and the West Bank. Washington looks to the Tel Aviv because of its greater immediate familiarity with military operations against a civilian population. In its turn, the Zionist state seeks inspiration from earlier and even more grotesque sources. One must recall that on January 25 last year an unnamed IDF officer was quoted in an article by *Ha’aretz* reporter Amir Oren stating candidly, “If our job is to seize a densely packed refugee camp or take over the Nablus casbah, and if this job is given to an officer to carry out without casualties on both sides, he must before all else analyse and bring together the lessons of past battles, even—shocking though this might appear—to analyse how the German army operated in the Warsaw ghetto.”

Sharon’s spokesman Ra’anan Gissen made no attempt to deny that the IDF was seeking to emulate the Nazis. He responded to the outrage this remark unleashed by telling the media, “Some officers may have been looking at that. They thought that it was similar, because you would be fighting street-by-street against the Palestinian Authority.”



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