

The inevitable logic of US repression in Iraq

Richard Phillips
12 April 2004

The Bush administration's response to the popular uprising against the US-led occupation of Iraq has been to unleash a wave of bloody reprisals. US helicopter gunships, jets, tanks and heavily armed soldiers have laid siege to Fallujah in the Sunni triangle, while military attacks have been launched on Sadr City in Baghdad and other areas under Shiite control. Hundreds of innocent Iraqi men, women and children have been killed and wounded, and the American military has destroyed homes, factories and mosques.

The US media, which act as cheerleaders for Washington, have demanded even more brutal attacks. As George Will in the *Washington Post* declared last week: "In the war against the militias every door American troops crash through, every civilian bystander shot—there will be many—will make matters worse, for a while. Nevertheless, the first task of the occupation remains the first task of government: to establish a monopoly on violence."

Echoing this, David V. Rivkin and Lee A. Casey, former members of the Bush and Reagan administrations, called for the establishment of military courts in Iraq to impose severe punishments, including executions, of Iraqi insurgents. Anything less than this, they declared in the *Washington Post*, would be taken as a sign of weakness and would encourage "terrorism."

Such bloodthirsty demands recall the repression of Algeria by French imperialism in 1957-62, which took an estimated 1 million lives, and point in the direction of Nazi-style reprisals against the civilian population of Iraq.

Although the Bush administration is not a fascist regime, Washington's attempt to seize control of Iraqi oil and implement its long-term aim of politically reorganizing the Middle East to benefit American corporations can be sustained only through military terror. There is an inevitable logic to such colonialist

enterprises. As resistance to foreign occupation grows, the occupying power responds with ever-greater violence and bloodshed. Sooner rather than later, Washington will feel itself compelled to employ the types of methods used by the Nazis to suppress the resistance movements in occupied Europe during World War II.

In the early years of that war, many civilian supporters of the resistance were deported to Germany and put on trial before special courts. But as the concentration camp population grew and opposition mounted, the German occupiers adopted increasingly barbaric and desperate methods.

As British historian Mark Mazower explained in *Inside Hitler's Greece: The Experience of Occupation 1941-44*: "In the absence of a coherent military strategy for countering the guerrillas, the Wehrmacht relied heavily on policies and standing orders which targeted civilians.... One of the basic assumptions behind German occupation policy was that 'terror had to be answered with terror' to force the population to withdraw its support from the insurgents. Although reprisals are often the instinctive response of isolated, frightened and trigger-happy troops in the field, the concept of retribution occupied a special place in the principle of military justice, fixed within the broad framework of social attitudes in the Third Reich, and demanded with all the authority of his office by the Fuhrer himself."

In other words, cold-blooded murder became administrative policy to subjugate entire regions and countries. According to one German military directive: "Every civilian who impedes or incites others to impede the German Armed Forces is considered a guerrilla."

Is this what the White House and the Pentagon have in mind when they declare that they plan to eliminate all Iraqi resistance?

Orders issued by German military commander Wilhelm Keitel, one of those tried for war crimes at Nuremberg in 1945, typified Nazi reprisal policies: “This struggle has nothing to do with soldierly chivalry or the regulations of the Geneva Convention. If this war...is not waged with the most brutal methods, the available forces will...no longer be sufficient to overcome this plague. The troops are justified and obliged to resort to all measures—even against women and children—without leniency, as long as they are successful.”

The German high command issued minimum quotas for reprisals: 50 to 100 hostages were to be shot for any attack on, or death of, a German soldier. Ten were to be executed if a German soldier was wounded. These figures were often doubled or tripled.

One of the numerous war crimes committed by the Nazis occurred in Czechoslovakia, following the May 1942 assassination of Hitler-appointed government stooge Reinhard Heydrich. Hitler ordered a bloody crackdown, and two villages—Lidice and Lezaky—were singled out for punishment.

German stormtroopers surrounded both villages and proceeded to execute the entire male population and all but a handful of women and children. The villages were then razed to the ground. As the war continued, the destruction of Lidice and Lezaky became the model for fascist Germany’s response to resistance throughout the occupied countries.

Nazi soldiers invading Crete in May 1941 responded to local opposition with “revenge operations.” These consisted of shootings, forced levies, the torching of villages, and the extermination (*Ausrottung*) of the male population in parts of the island. “All operations are to be carried out with great speed, leaving aside all formalities and certainly dispensing with special courts.... These are not meant for beasts and murderers,” one German commander declared.

On July 14, 1943, General Lohr instructed the 1st Panzer Division to take the “most severe measures” against any signs of hostility and warned that any commander who failed to do so would face harsh disciplinary measures, including court martial.

A year later, in August 1944, Nazi troops on Crete were ordered to take “vigorous action...in order to force our will upon the Greek population, and in order to prove that we can assert our power on the whole

island.” The order continued: “To this end discretion can no longer be observed towards innocent men, women and children.”

Though the Bush administration and the Pentagon are not yet ordering American troops to deliberately target women and children, it ultimately has only one answer to the mounting popular opposition to the illegal US occupation: more military violence and terror. A senior British military officer in Iraq complained this weekend that the US military viewed Iraqis as *Untermenschen* (subhumans), a phrase Hitler used to describe those he regarded as racially inferior—Jews, gypsies and Slavs.



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