

Torture exposed in new US-Iraqi “security stations”

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The brutal methods being employed by US forces and the Iraqi military in the current “surge” of US military operations in Baghdad were laid bare by an article that appeared in Sunday’s *New York Times*. Entitled, “Three suspects talk after Iraqi soldiers do dirty work,” the piece details the torture of Sunni prisoners at one of the new American-Iraqi “security stations” set up in the capital city as part of the US plan to crush popular resistance to the occupation of Iraq.

The article, the first in a series on the new military outposts, focuses on a security station in the Ghazaliya neighborhood of western Baghdad, which *Times* reporter Alissa Rubin describes as “one of the roughest areas” of the capital, where an “active insurgency” against US forces is ongoing. She hints at the devastation wrought by the US occupation in the mixed Sunni-Shiite neighborhood, describing sectarian conflict, pools of open sewage in the streets, non-functioning water and electricity services and a neighborhood with fewer than half the houses occupied. The anti-US insurgency, says one Iraqi officer, consists chiefly of young, unemployed men who lack food and money and are too poor to marry.

Nevertheless, the reporter takes as given the necessity to stamp out opposition and suggests in the end that torture may be undesirable but nevertheless necessary to “save” American lives. “Out here in what soldiers call Baghdad’s wild west,” Rubin declares, “sometimes the choices are all bad.”

Opened on March 15, the new security station in Ghazaliya consists of 70 US soldiers from Company D of the Second Battalion, along with an unspecified number of Iraqi soldiers. It is named, the reporter notes, for Specialist Robert Thrasher, a member of the US unit who was killed by sniper fire on February 11. Faced with a hostile populace, US-Iraqi foot

patrols—which were supposed, according to Bush, to “gain the trust of Baghdad residents”—have been cancelled. Although the next security station is barely half a mile away, the soldiers rarely venture out of the compound in their armored vehicles and mainly stay hunkered down behind rows of sandbags.

Recently, Iraqi soldiers picked up a detainee who was later beaten—Mustafa Subhi Jassam—after seeing him loitering around a main patrol route twice in one day. Two other suspects were picked up separately. After being subjected to torture for “most of the night,” Jassam—described as a thin young man wearing a blue and red warm-up outfit—was handed over to the Americans, where he led them to a safe houses where insurgents stored weapons and improvised explosive devices and planned attacks against US forces. The US officer in charge of the station, Captain Darren Fowler, praised the Iraqi soldiers for their “very good work.”

“What the Americans did not know,” Rubin claimed, “and what the Iraqis had not told them was that before handing over the detainees to the Americans, the Iraqi soldiers had beaten one of them in front of the other two, the Iraqis said.” The *Times* article continued, “The stripes on the detainee’s back, which appeared to be the product of a whipping with electrical cables, were later shown briefly to a photographer, who was not allowed to take a picture.” The article was accompanied by a photograph of a blindfolded prisoner, bent on his knees between two soldiers—it is not clear whether they are American or Iraqi—with what appears to be broken electrical wire on the floor. The caption reads, “This suspected insurgent cooperated after Iraqi soldiers beat a fellow detainee, an Iraqi Army officer said.”

Speaking through an interpreter Captain Bassim Hassan, the Iraqi officer in charge told the reporter, “I prepared him for the Americans and let them take his

confession. We know how to make them talk. We know their back streets. We beat them. I don't beat them that much, but enough so he feels the pain and it makes him desperate." He added, "I didn't beat them all. I beat Mustafa in front of the others. We tell him we're going to string him up"—demonstrating with his arms spread wide—"and, I make the others see him."

Rubin makes the obligatory statement that "beating is strictly forbidden" by the US Army's Field Manual, as well as US and Iraqi laws. "When the Americans learned about the beating," she claims, "they were quick to condemn it." This is nothing but self-serving nonsense. It is well known that leading officials in the Bush administration, including former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, encouraged US commanders to disregard the Geneva Convention, and that the torture revealed in Abu Ghraib was only the tip of the iceberg.

The report from Ghazaliya makes clear that the US is now also outsourcing torture to the military forces of the US-backed regime in Baghdad in order to maintain "plausible deniability" of direct US military participation in torture. At the very least, US military commanders have given their Iraqi counterparts a green light to use these methods to extract information and terrorize the local population in areas where the insurgents have widespread support. After the prisoner was returned to the Iraqis, Rubin reports, Captain Fowler was asked whether the Americans realized that the information was given only after the Iraqis had beaten Mr. Jassam. "'They are not supposed to do that,' he said. 'What I don't see, I don't know, and I can't stop. The detainees are deathly afraid of being sent to the Iraqi justice system, because this is the kind of thing they do. But this is their culture,'" Fowler said.

One of the key reasons for the US invasion of Iraq—long cited by the Bush administration, the Democratic apologists for the invasion and the news media—was that Saddam Hussein was torturing his own people. Now, US military commanders justify the use of these barbaric methods on an even greater scale by blaming Iraqi "culture."

The truth is that, as the US military and political debacle in Iraq grows, US military commanders are relying more and more on the traditional methods of counter-insurgency—such as those used by the French in

Algeria, the British in Malaysia, the US in Vietnam and Central America—to round up, torture and assassinate political opponents, in order to secure US control over the oil rich nation.

In the aftermath of the Abu Ghraib revelations, Israeli-Arab Knesset member Talab al-Sanai revealed that US officers joined Israeli army units in the West Bank city of Jenin in late 2003 or early 2004 for the purpose of learning Israeli methods and techniques of repressing civilians, which the Americans, he said, later applied in Iraq. "It took Israel 37 years to develop and perfect these barbaric methods of repression and humiliation," al-Sanai observed. "Surprisingly, the Americans surpassed and outmatched the Israelis in their savagery in less than two years."

Since the surge began more than 5,000 Iraqi citizens have been arrested, bringing the total number of Iraqis detained—according to US military figures—to 18,000. According to the *Christian Science Monitor*, the US military commander in Iraq, Army Gen. David Petraeus is making plans to hold up to 40,000 Iraqis in coming months. Most will be held indefinitely to collect intelligence about local networks and terrorist or insurgent activity, the magazine notes. Others will be transferred to the Iraqis, where they are subject to the US puppet regime's notorious justice system, which has left tens of thousands of Iraqi citizens imprisoned without charges, tortured with electric drills, and murdered.



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