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US war drive

# Deepening Brutality of America's War

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**The Bush administration is fighting a desperate rearguard action against worldwide protests about its mass detention and torture policy, especially an Amnesty International report saying that Guantanamo is "the new Gulag". At the same time repression inside Iraq is reaching a new crescendo, as US and allied Iraqi forces carry out ever more indiscriminate attacks and detention sweeps. This article first looks at the war in Iraq, second the worldwide system of secret detention and torture.**

April was a bad month for the US aim of militarily crushing the resistance fighters. A total of 77 US troops were killed - the most since November's attack on Fallujah - as well as hundreds of Iraqi soldiers and police. According to the US army, insurgent attacks have doubled since early this year. In some places the fighting has turned into Sunni-Shia gun battles, while other Shia fighters have attacked US and British forces. Hundreds have been killed in bomb attacks.

US forces have stepped up their attempts to draw resistance fighters into open battle. In early May thousands of marines launched 'Operation Matador' in Anbar province, the desert region West of Baghdad, in an attempt to find and eliminate fighters, as well as to try to stem the influx of fighters across the Syrian border.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/ms1.jpg>]

According to the Los Angeles Times: "For seven days, Marines rumbled through desert villages and fought pitched battles against a surprisingly well-co-ordinated enemy. On the first day of the operation, insurgents appeared to be willing to stand their ground and fight the Marines, but U.S. military officials now believe that may have been a tactic to delay U.S. troops from crossing into the Ramana region north of the Euphrates River. This delay, officials said, could have given many of the insurgents time to escape into Syria.

"It's an extremely frustrating fight," said Maj. Steve White, operations director for the 3rd Battalion, 25th Marine Regiment. "Fighting these guys is like picking up water. You're going to lose some every time'.

"A military news release declared the mission a success, saying that U.S. troops had killed more than 125 insurgents. Nine Marines were killed and 40 were wounded during the operation.

"Yet as soon as the operation concluded, the Marines crossed back over the Euphrates River and left no U.S. or Iraqi government presence in the region - generally considered a major mistake in counterinsurgency warfare." [1].

## Indiscriminate Bombardment

Local people complained that the Marines had bombarded villages from the air indiscriminately, and they had returned to their homes to find them destroyed. The conclusion many US observers drew is that there are just not enough US troops in the area, or in Iraq as a whole, to successfully thwart a guerrilla war.

Since the beginning of the year American forces have resorted to huge house-to-house sweeps looking for suspected insurgents, particularly in Baghdad and resulting in hundreds being detained. On May 23 thousands of US and allied Iraqi troops swept through suburbs of Baghdad in "Operation Squeeze Play", detaining - according to their

figures - 437 people.

According to Tom Lasseter, "Bystanders were also apparently caught up in the dragnet, however. Some Iraqis said that while Operation Squeeze Play took some insurgents off the streets, it's also likely to fuel the same cycle that has hounded the American presence for two years: angering moderate Iraqis while giving insurgents a friendlier environment in which to carry out attacks." [2]

## Sectarian Killings and Death Squads

The emergence of fighting in some towns between Sunnis and Shi'as, and an apparent war of tit-for-tat assassinations is lending a sinister new twist to the quagmire. It is clear from the number of bodies which have been discovered that death squads are operating, and it is not clear exactly who they are. According to Mohammad Bazi "The signs of sectarian warfare are everywhere in Iraq these days: clerics assassinated outside their mosques, dozens of execution victims turning up in ditches and car bombers inflicting heavy casualties on the country's Shia Muslim majority.

"Nearly four months after Iraq's election, when millions of Iraqis defied insurgent threats by voting for a new parliament, sectarian violence now threatens to drag the country into civil war. Most victims so far have been Shias targeted by Sunni insurgents. But the recent discoveries throughout Iraq of more than 50 bodies - men from both sects, apparently abducted and executed - highlight a new problem: a wave of retaliatory killings between Sunnis and Shias." [3]

At the beginning of the year the US was considering putting in place an assassination programme to try to eliminate insurgency leaders. According to former UN arms inspector Scott Ritter; "... the Pentagon is considering the organisation, training and equipping of so-called death squads, teams of Iraqi assassins who would be used to infiltrate and eliminate the leadership of the Iraqi resistance.

"Called the Salvador Option, in reference to similar US-backed death squads that terrorised the population of El Salvador during the 1980s, the proposed plan actually has as its roots the Phoenix assassination programme undertaken during the Vietnam war, where American-led assassins killed thousands of known or suspected Vietcong collaborators.

"Perhaps it is a sign of the desperation felt inside the Pentagon, or an underscoring of the ideological perversity of those in charge, that the US military would draw upon the failed programmes of the past to resolve an insoluble problem of today." [4]

If the US was operating assassination squads or secretly assisting them, it would not be the first time in Iraq. According to Ritter: "The Salvador Option would not be the first embrace of assassination as a tool of occupation undertaken by the United States in Iraq.

"In the months following Paul Bremer's taking over of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) in June 2003, the streets of Baghdad crawled with scores of assassination squads.

"Among the more effective and brutal of these units were those drawn from the Badr Brigade, the armed militia of the Shia political party known as the Supreme Council of the Islamic Revolution in Iraq, or SCIRI. Although not publicly acknowledged, the role played by the various anti-Saddam militias in confronting the residual elements of Saddam's

former ruling Ba'ath Party offered a glimpse into what was, and is, an unspoken element of the US policy regarding de-Ba'athification - let the Iraqis do the dirty work.

"SCIRI's efforts to exterminate Ba'ath Party remnants still loyal to Saddam Hussein, or who stand accused of committing crimes against SCIRI or its sympathisers, attracted the attention of the "black" side of the CPA-run de-Baathification efforts - covert operations run by the CIA and elite Special Operations units of the United States military. Of all the various players in this deadly game, the Badr militia stood out as the most willing and able to take the fight to the Baathist holdouts. Tipped off by the CPA's covert operatives, the Badr assassination squads killed dozens of Baathists in and around Baghdad."

## Brutal Colonial War

Now the US has decided to swamp Baghdad with troops to try to make insurgent bomb attacks more difficult. Operation Lightning aims at the permanent deployment of 40,000 US and Iraqi troops around the city.

Overall then, while constructing a provisional government the US is following the classical path taken in brutal colonial wars - in Aden, Kenya, Algeria, Vietnam and many other places - of responding to unresolved insurgency by drastically increasing violence and repression, which becomes ever more indiscriminate and punishes the civilian population more and more.

[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/ms7.jpg>]

Nothing more demonstrates the callousness towards Iraqi civilians than the continuing plight of 200,000-plus refugees from the destroyed city of Fallujah, flattened by marines last November. Most remain stuck in pathetic camps, unable to return to their destroyed homes. Jonathan Steele and Dhar Jamail [5] writing in the UK Guardian state: "In the 1930s the Spanish city of Guernica became a symbol of wanton murder and destruction. In the 1990s Grozny was cruelly flattened by the Russians; it still lies in ruins. This decade's unforgettable monument to brutality and overkill is Falluja.."

Anti-war activist Milan Raj, founder of Voices in the Wilderness, has reconstructed a detailed picture of why Fallujah became a key centre of the resistance, and his account is more evidence of the random callousness of US troops. [6]

He argues: "But how did Fallujah become the heart of the Iraqi insurgency? For the answer we must turn back to the events of April 2003, when US troops entered the peaceful city of Fallujah and occupied the local secondary school. Local people angry about the US occupation, and demanding the re-opening of the school, demonstrated outside the school on the evening of 28 April, nearly three weeks after the fall of the regime. US soldiers fired on the crowd, killing 13 civilians immediately.

"This is the same number of civilians as was killed by British soldiers in Derry in Northern Ireland on Bloody Sunday in 1972. The Fallujah massacre was Iraq's Bloody Sunday, a similarly potent injustice sparking armed resistance. The official US account was that 25 armed civilians, mixed in with the crowd and also positioned on nearby rooftops, fired on the soldiers of the 82nd Airborne, leading to a 'fire-fight'. (BBC News Online, 29 April 2003) Phil Reeves, a reporter for the Independent on Sunday, conducted a careful independent investigation and concluded that the official story was a 'highly implausible version of events'.

"Despite the atrocity that had been visited on them, the people of Fallujah continued to protest nonviolently. A demonstration was held on 30 April, two days after the school massacre.

"During the protest, US troops shot dead two more unarmed demonstrators. No US soldiers were injured or killed, despite claims that they had been fired on first. Reporters from the British Daily Mirror were six feet from the US soldier who opened fire on the demonstrators. A young boy 'hurled a sandal at the US jeep-with a M2 heavy machine gun post on the back-as it drove past in a convoy of other vehicles.' The soldier in charge of the machine gun ducked down, 'then pressed his thumb on the trigger' to unleash a 20-second burst of automatic fire at 'a crowd of 1,000 unarmed people.'

"...After two Bloody Sundays in three days, the people of Fallujah turned decisively to violence. Khalaf Abed Shebib, a tribal leader in Falluja, said a few days later, 'People are ready to die in this battle.' Two days after 30 April massacre a local imam had had to call off a demonstration after seeing protesters stuffing hand grenades into their pockets."

## Worldwide Gulag

After detailed investigations by numerous journalists and human rights organisations a detailed picture of the US worldwide network of detention and torture is emerging. It is increasingly based on secret detention facilities in Afghanistan, but according to the US lawyers organisation Human Rights First [\[7\]](#), in addition to Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay there are at least 22 detention facilities in Iraq, one confirmed and two suspected centres in the US itself, two in Pakistan, a CIA interrogation centre in Jordan and probably some kind of detention and interrogation facility at the US base on the British-owned island of Diego Garcia. According to Adrian Levy and Cathy Scott-Clark [\[8\]](#) "The floating population of 'ghost detainees', according to US and UK military officials, now exceeds 10,000.

"What has been glimpsed in Afghanistan is a radical plan to replace Guantánamo Bay. When that detention centre was set up in January 2002, it was essentially an offshore gulag - beyond the reach of the US constitution and even the Geneva conventions. That all changed in July 2004. The US supreme court ruled that the federal court in Washington had jurisdiction to hear a case that would decide if the Cuban detentions were in violation of the US constitution, its laws or treaties.

"The military commissions, which had been intended to dispense justice to the prisoners, were in disarray, too. No prosecution cases had been prepared and no defence cases would be readily offered as the US National Association of Criminal Defence Lawyers had described the commissions as unethical, a decision backed by a federal judge who ruled in January that they were "illegal". Guantánamo was suddenly bogged down in domestic lawsuits. It had lost its practicality. So a global prison network built up over the previous three years, beyond the reach of American and European judicial process, immediately began to pick up the slack. The process became explicit last week when the Pentagon announced that half of the 540 or so inmates at Guantánamo are to be transferred to prisons in Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia....

"Prisoner transports crisscross the country (Afghanistan) between a proliferating network of detention facilities. In addition to the camps in Gardez, there are thought to be US holding facilities in the cities of Khost, Asadabad and Jalalabad, as well as an official US detention centre in Kandahar, where the tough regime has been nicknamed 'Camp Slappy' by former prisoners. There are 20 more facilities in outlying US compounds and fire bases that complement a major 'collection centre' at Bagram air force base. The CIA has one facility at Bagram and another, known as the 'Salt Pit', in an abandoned brick factory north of Kabul. More than 1,500 prisoners from Afghanistan and many other countries are thought to be held in such jails, although no one knows for sure because the US military declines to comment.

"Anyone who has got in the way of the prison transports has been met with brutal force. Bidar directed us to a small

Shia neighbourhood on the edge of town where a multiple killing was still under investigation. Inside a frozen courtyard, a former policeman, Said Sardar, 25, was sat beside his crutches. On May 1 2004, he was manning a checkpoint when a car careened through. 'Inside were men dressed like Arabs, but they were western men,' he said. 'They had prisoners in the car.' Sardar fired a warning shot for the car to stop. 'The western men returned fire and within minutes two US attack helicopters hovered above us. They fired three rockets at the police station. One screamed past me. I saw its fiery tail and blacked out'...

"We have obtained prisoner letters, declassified FBI files, legal depositions, witness statements and testimony from US and UK officials, which document the alleged methods deployed in Afghanistan - shackles, hoods, electrocution, whips, mock executions, sexual humiliation and starvation - and suggest they are practised across the network. Sir Nigel Rodley, a former UN special rapporteur on torture, said, "The more hidden detention practices there are, the more likely that all legal and moral constraints on official behaviour will be removed'."

## Rendering Suspects for Torture

One of the most sinister aspects of the worldwide system of torture and secret detention is the "rendering" of suspects to their countries of origin, or third-party states, where they will be tortured. The CIA, using a front company, operates a Gulfstream jet which moves detainees around to different US facilities, or "renders" them torture to other states.

One of many examples is the following case described by Levy and Scott-Clark of two Egyptian refugees in Sweden, 'rendered' back to their home country at the request of the US: "On December 18 2001, Agiza and a second Egyptian refugee, Mohammed Al-Zery, had been arrested by Swedish intelligence acting upon a request from the US. They were driven, shackled and blindfolded, to Stockholm's Bromma airport, where they were cuffed and cut from their clothes. Suppositories were inserted into both men's anuses, they were wrapped in plastic nappies, dressed in jumpsuits and handed over to an American aircrew who flew them out of Sweden on a private executive jet.

"Agiza and Al-Zery landed in Cairo at 3am the next morning and were taken to the state security investigation office, where they were held in solitary confinement in underground cells. Mohammed Zarai, former director of the Cairo-based Human Rights Centre for the Assistance of Prisoners, told us that Agiza was repeatedly electrocuted, hung upside down, whipped with an electrical flex and hospitalised after being made to lick his cell floor clean."

## Amnesty Slams Bush

George Bush at the end of May denounced the new Amnesty International report *Guantánamo and beyond: The continuing pursuit of unchecked executive power* as absurd. Amnesty said that Guantanamo is the 'new Gulag'. Bush replied that in the future the occupation of Iraq would be seen as the US's "golden moment".

The tone and language of the Amnesty report is almost unprecedented. Despite its unpopularity with repressive governments, Amnesty guards its political neutrality and "respectability" jealously - indeed these things are precondition for it being able to bring pressure on governments. But on this occasion Amnesty has even been prepared to reply immediately to Bush, accusing him of once again failing to address the issues. Amnesty says

"Guantánamo is only the visible part of the story. Evidence continues to mount that the US operates a network of detention centres where people are held in secret or outside any proper legal framework "from Afghanistan to Iraq

and beyond," said Amnesty International.

"US interrogation and detention policies and practices during the 'war on terror', have deliberately and systematically breached the absolute prohibition of torture and ill-treatment. Individuals held in US custody have been transferred for interrogation to countries known to practice torture.

"If President Bush and his administration are serious about freedom and human dignity they should recommit to the rule of law and human rights." Amnesty then call for:

- end all secret and incommunicado detentions;
- grant the International Committee of the Red Cross full access to all detainees including those held in secret locations;
- ensure recourse to the law for all detainees;
- establish a full independent commission of inquiry into all allegations of torture, ill-treatment, arbitrary detentions and "disappearances";
- bring to justice anyone responsible for authorizing or committing human rights violations."

According to Amnesty the US has detained more than 70,000 people during the 'war on terrorism'.

The indefatigable British Middle East commentator Robert Fisk delivered a searing indictment of the whole enterprise in another brilliant article in the UK Independent: [\[9\]](#) "Two years after "Mission Accomplished", whatever moral stature the United States could claim at the end of its invasion of Iraq has long ago been squandered in the torture and abuse and deaths at Abu Ghraib. That the symbol of Saddam Hussein's brutality should have been turned by his own enemies into the symbol of their own brutality is a singularly ironic epitaph for the whole Iraq adventure. We have all been contaminated by the cruelty of the interrogators and the guards and prison commanders.

"How did this culture of filth start in America's "war on terror"? The institutionalised injustice which we have witnessed across the world, the vile American "renditions" in which prisoners are freighted to countries where they can be roasted, electrified or, in Uzbekistan, cooked alive in fat? As Bob Herbert wrote in The New York Times, what seemed mind-boggling when the first pictures emerged from Abu Ghraib is now routine, typical of the abuse that has 'permeated the Bush administration's operations'.

"With an insurgency growing ever more vicious and uncontrollable, the emptiness of Mr Bush's silly boast is plain. The real mission, it seems, was to institutionalise the cruelty of Western armies, staining us forever with the depravity of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and Bagram - not to mention the secret prisons which even the Red Cross cannot visit and wherein who knows what vileness is conducted. What, I wonder, is our next 'mission'?"

Naomi Klein gives explicit replies to Fisk's rhetorical questions in her recent article on torture. [\[10\]](#) Torture she says is not about getting information, it's about intimidation and control, to strike fear into enemies and potential enemies. "This is torture's true purpose: to terrorize" not only the people in Guantánamo's cages and Syria's isolation cells but also, and more important, the broader community that hears about these abuses.

"Torture is a machine designed to break the will to resist" the individual prisoner's will and the collective will.... the only sensible explanation for torture's persistent popularity comes from a most unlikely source. "Lynndie England, the fall girl for Abu Ghraib, was asked during her botched trial why she and her colleagues had forced naked prisoners into a human pyramid. "As a way to control them," she replied. Exactly. As an interrogation tool, torture is a bust. But when it comes to social control, nothing works quite like torture."

## Deepening Brutality of America's War

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[<https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/ph-3.jpg>]

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[1] Insurgents Flourish in Iraq's Wild West by Mark Mazzetti and Solomon Moore, Los Angeles Times May 24, 2005

[2] [US Troops round up suspected insurgents in random arrests during offensive](#), by Tom Lasseter , Knight Ridder newspapers, May 23, 2005

[3] Retaliatory killings, mainly involving Shias and Sunnis, threaten to throw country into deadly civil war by Mohamad Bazzi, Newsday, May 23, 2005.

[4] The Salvador Option , Scott Ritter, Znet, 25 January.

[5] [This is our Guernica. Jonathan Steele and Dahr Jamail. The Guardian. 27 April 2005.](#)

[6] Turning Point Fallujah: How US Atrocities Sparked The Iraqi Resistance, Electronic Iraq, 4 May 2005.

[7] Ending Secret Detention, Human Rights First, June 2004. Available in pdf format at their website.

[8] [One Huge US Jail. The Guardian. Saturday March 19, 2005.](#)

[9] America's shame, two years on from 'Mission Accomplished', Independent, Robert Fisk - 08 May 2005. Read it at the Robert Fisk site.

[10] Torture's Dirty Little Secret, May 12, The Nation