

## GI SPECIAL #162



**THE LOOK**---IT REALLY IS TIME TO GET THE HELL OUT: An Iraqi uses body language to express his submission to U.S. soldiers in Samarra, Dec. 27, 2003. (AP Photo/Hadi Mizban)

# Iraqi Resistance Attacks Karbala Bases Killing 13, Wounding 172

By SAMEER N. YACOUB, Associated Press Writer 12.27.03 & Reuters

**KARBALA, Iraq** - Rebels unleashed a coordinated string of attacks on occupation military bases and the governor's office in the southern city of Karbala on Saturday, killing 13 people — including six soldiers from the U.S.-led occupation force and six Iraqi police officers — and wounding at least 172, officials said.

Four of the dead soldiers were from Bulgaria and two from Thailand. An Iraqi civilian also was killed. **In three nearly simultaneous assaults** attackers detonated four car bombs and fired mortar shells and grenades, **wounding at least 37 other coalition soldiers, including five Americans and 19 Bulgarians**, U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Mark Kimmitt said in Baghdad.

Some 135 Iraqi civilians and police officers also were wounded, said Ali al-Arzawi, deputy director of Karbala General Hospital.



**TOO LITTLE TOO LATE, NO HOPE:** U.S. soldiers in Karbala, south of Baghdad, Iraq, where rebels unleashed a massive and coordinated assault on a pair of military bases and the governor's office Dec. 27, 2003 (AP Photo/Muhammed Muheisen)

A spokesman for Polish-led troops in the region said "We know that in Karbala...there were multiple attacks, (positions of) two coalition forces were attacked, also the city hall and the police station,"

Insurgents may have targeted this city 70 miles south of Baghdad on the assumption that military targets there would be more vulnerable to attack.

Iraqi witnesses say a water truck contained one of the bombs, and that coalition soldiers sprayed it with gunfire as it drove toward a military base beside the university and exploded.

**Witnesses also said they saw smoke and fire rise from the governor's office after a mortar attack.**

**One of four suicide bombers in Karbala gained entry to a Bulgarian camp, cutting through roadblocks in a car and destroying a building where the headquarters of the unit was located, Bulgarian Deputy Defense Minister Ilko Dimitrov said in Sofia.**

**"We expected these attacks because Karbala was suspiciously peaceful in the recent time,"** said Nikola Kolev, the Bulgarian army chief of staff. "We improved security measures every day but terrorists change their tactics all the time." **(Another empty General, proving incompetence knows no nationality. Note the paragraph above about how the attackers got through the roadblocks and the Generals' admission that the attack was "expected." How exactly did the General "improve security" "every day?" And who's going to believe that "every day" smoke?)**

**Six Iraqi police officers and an Iraqi woman living next to one of the military bases were killed in Karbala**, said Ali al-Arzawi, deputy director of the General Hospital. Some 135 Iraqi civilians and police officers also were wounded there, many of them slightly, he said.

**"It was a coordinated, massive attack planned on a big scale *and intended to do much harm*," Polish Maj. Gen. Andrzej Tyszkiewicz said from his headquarters at Camp Babylon, east of Karbala. (Breathhtaking analysis. An attacking army "intends to do much harm." All the military textbooks will have to be rewritten!)**

He said three car bombers were shot before they could drive the explosive-packed vehicles into the Bulgarian bases or the damage might have been more severe. The fourth bomb exploded in front of the regional governor's office.

A policeman at the scene said he saw two rockets explode in the street in front of the governor's office.

Around 5 p.m. Saturday, a bomb was found and defused outside Karbala's human rights organization, its director, Seyed Hussein Ibrahim, said.

After the attacks, U.S. troops sealed off the debris-strewn area around the governor's office. Three destroyed cars lay in the street. At the hospital, crying people crowded the corridors, searching for missing family members.

"I was in the front office when I heard a loud explosion," Wahab Abdel Hussain, a 45-year-old desk officer at the governor's office, said from his hospital bed, blood running down his face.

"Shattered glass hit me in the face and then I passed out. I woke up in the hospital."

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## **Bulgarians Evacuating Bases; 60 Occupation Troops And Karbala Governor Wounded; Thai Soldiers Killed; Thai MP Says Bring The Troops Home Now!**

December 28, 2003 Nation Multimedia Group, 44 Moo 10 Bang Na-Trat KM 4.5, Bang Na district, Bangkok 10260 Thailand

**Two Thai soldiers were killed instantly and one injured yesterday when a truck bomb exploded in front of the gate of their military camp in this southern city, according to Thai and foreign officials.**

The killed soldiers were identified as Sgt-Major First Class Amporn Chukerd and Sgt-Major First Class Mit Klaharn, both of whom belonged to the Army Engineering Corps, and were stationed at the camp's entrance.

The government had planned to call an urgent press conference to explain the situation last night, but later decided to postpone it to today when Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra is expected to address the tragedy himself.

Army commander-in-chief General Chaisith Shinawatra last night called an urgent conference of military top brass, but no announcement was made.

**A high-ranking military officer, who requested anonymity, said the tragedy could have resulted from lax security. The Thais wanted to have warm relations with ordinary Iraqis so security checks may not have been strict.**

*The Thais were confident enough about their security that they planned to send 200 Thai civilians to visit their troops. A Thai newspaper, The Nation, said the tourists would travel with senior military officials in February. In the wake of the attacks, it was unclear whether the plan would go ahead.* (SAMEER N. YACOUB, Associated Press Writer)

**Opposition Democrat MP Tavorn Sennem said the government had been warned earlier that it should not send Thai troops to Iraq because the mission did not have a United Nations mandate.**

***Tavorn urged the government to bring the troops home.***

Lt-General Kemrat Kanchanawat of the Supreme Command said several insurgent groups had operated around the Thai camp, while Lt-General Thanadej Prathumrat, head of the Army Engineering Corp, said the Army would consider providing maximum compensation to the families of both Thai soldiers.

**A government official said the 485 Bulgarian troops in the area were being evacuated because their bases had been destroyed, and the defense ministry had lost communication with them, he said. The headquarters was also destroyed.**

**At least 80 other coalition soldiers, including five Americans, were injured, US Army Brig-General Mark Kimmitt said in Baghdad.**

**AFP reported from Karbala that insurgents targeted US allies just as the first Japanese troops arrived in Kuwait in readiness for a deployment to Iraq.**

"Around 1pm (5pm Bangkok time), there were three attacks using four car bombs, mortars and machine guns," said a spokesman for the Polish-led multinational division that patrols south-central Iraq.

**Karbala governor Akram al-Yasseri said from his hospital bed that "a car bomb or rocket was the cause of the explosions".**

A total of five provincial employees were among the wounded.

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## Four Bulgarian Soldiers Killed; General Says War Can Be Won

2003-12-27 Novinite Ltd.

Bulgaria's Defense Ministry confirmed information about the four Bulgarian soldiers killed in attacks in the Iraqi city of Karbala earlier on Saturday.

The victims were named Georgi Kachorin, Anton Petrov, Ivan Indzhov and Svilen Kirov.

Bulgaria's Deputy Defense Minister Ilko Dimitrov offered condolence to the families of the victims. "We are facing an enemy that has no morals, **but that enemy is not invincible,**" Dimitrov added. **(That's really reassuring.)**

The bombers targeted two camps of the Bulgarian unit, as well as the municipality building, shortly after midday.

**Bulgarian deputy defence minister Ilko Dimitrov told a news conference in the Bulgarian capital, Sofia that as well as the deaths, at least 27 Bulgarian troops were injured when a car bomb hit the Bulgarian military headquarters in the city.**

All of them were immediately evacuated to Iraq's capital Baghdad, the statement read.

Bulgaria's Army Chief Gen. Nikola Kolev said at a special press conference later that Bulgarian army and defense chiefs will leave for Karbala Sunday on a special plane that should transport the bodies of those four men to Bulgaria. The injured Bulgarian soldiers will also be taken back to their homeland to receive special medical treatment.

The Bulgarian soldiers arrived in Karbala on August 22 this year. The unit is formed by 69 army officers, 109 sergeants and 300 soldiers.

Later, Private Pavlina Lambeva accidentally wounded herself in the leg. An investigation was launched into the case, but officials in Bulgaria reported that Lambeva was given the medical treatment she needed, and that all other soldiers were in good health.

According to the Bulgarian National Radio, **the whole city was hit by chaos.** Attackers targeted **two military coalition camps at the city's university** and at a police station, as well as the mayor's office.

Currently, there are almost 500 Bulgarian soldiers in the city, as well as troops from Poland, the Philippines, Thailand and the US.

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# 5 Americans Among Karbala Wounded

The Associated Press KARBALA, Iraq Dec. 27

**Armed with car bombs, mortars and machine guns, insurgents launched three coordinated attacks in the southern city of Karbala on Saturday**, killing four coalition soldiers and injuring 25 others, a Polish commander said.

**One car bomb detonated in front of the main Iraqi police station in Karbala, injuring five soldiers from the U.S. Army's 18th Military Police Brigade as well as an undetermined number of Iraqi police**, said Lt. Col. Tom Evans, deputy commander of the brigade.

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## Resistance Blows Up Fuel Depots In Coordinated Attacks; Eighteen More U.S. Soldiers Wounded

SAMEER N. YACOUB, Associated Press Writer) 12.27.03

**Saturday, rebels detonated homemade bombs that set aflame a fuel depot and injured six American soldiers. The attacks occurred in Baghdad and in Habaniyah, west of the capital.**

**Elsewhere in Iraq today, six American soldiers were hurt in two separate roadside bombings.**

On Friday, four U.S. troops were killed in bomb blasts and a mortar attack and another died in a traffic accident, bringing the death toll for coalition forces in Iraq this week to 15.

**Air Force Capt. Patricia Teran-Matthews, a U.S. military spokeswoman, said five soldiers were injured Saturday when a U.S. convoy hit a "daisy chain" of two homemade roadside bombs in Baghdad, and another soldier was hurt in a similar roadside blast at Habaniyah, west of the capital.**

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## CJTF-7 SOLDIER DIES IN VEHICLE ACCIDENT

HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND  
December 27, 2003 Release Number: 03-12-27CCJTF-7

BAGHDAD, Iraq – A CJTF-7 soldier died of injuries received in a single military vehicle traffic accident at approximately 8 p.m. Dec. 26 in the Baghdad area. The soldier's name is being withheld pending next-of-kin notification.

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## That Unloved Feeling

December 26, 2003 By Matthew Cox, Army Times Staff Writer

The Christmas Eve presence patrol through Samarra started quietly enough — then someone fired a rocket-propelled grenade at Sgt. Raymond Soto's Stryker infantry carrier.

"It went over the vehicle and exploded in the air," said Soto, a team leader with A Company, 5th Battalion, 20th Infantry Regiment.

**The soldiers searched the area but came up with nothing.**

Three hours later, someone fired a burst of AK47 fire at the soldiers as they moved through one section of the city on foot.

**They never found the assailant.** No one was hurt, but the two incidents made for an unnerving night.

**"It was crazy," said Soto, of San Antonio. "I didn't know where it was coming from."**

The brigade was able to rotate most of its soldiers back to Forward Operating Base Pacesetter for a few hours to eat Christmas dinner and use a satellite phone to call home.

To Soto, whose unit was placed on convoy security, even a few hours break was appreciated.

"It's kind of nice today because all we are doing is escorting convoys in and out," said Soto in a Christmas Day interview. **"They have been using us like crazy. I can't remember the last time I had more than two or three hours sleep at a time."**

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## Coalition Collaborators Killed

By MICHELLE FAUL, Associated Press Writer 12.26.03

BAGHDAD, Iraq **Rebel gunmen also assassinated a Sunni Muslim tribal leader who backed the coalition near a mosque in the northern town of Mosul.**

In the Mosul assassination, gunmen in a speeding car shot and killed Sheik Talal al-Khalidi and his 23-year-old son, Saad Talal, said another son, Khalid, who witnessed the attack. A brother of the sheik was injured, and the assailants fled.

Al-Khalidi, 57, was a member of the loyalist National Assembly under Saddam who joined a new local governing council that works with U.S. troops. He led the Beni Khalid tribe, which also has members in Jordan, Qatar and Syria.

**Also in Mosul, an Iraqi lawyer working on a project funded by the U.S.-led coalition was assassinated Saturday. Adil Hadidi was shot dead as he walked out of his house, according to a neighbor, Firas Kamal.**

**Also Friday, three insurgents opened fire on a police station in Ramadi, some 60 miles west of Baghdad. One officer and one of the attackers were killed in an ensuing gunfight, police Col. Ziad Khalil said. The other rebels escaped.**

### **GET SOME TRUTH: CHECK OUT TRAVELING SOLDIER**

Telling the truth - about the occupation, the cuts to veterans benefits, or the dangers of depleted uranium - is the first reason Traveling Soldier is necessary. But we want to do more than tell the truth; we want to report on the resistance - whether it's in the streets of Baghdad, New York, or inside the armed forces. Our goal is for Traveling Soldier to become the thread that ties working-class people inside the armed services together. We want this newsletter to be a weapon to help you organize resistance within the armed forces. If you like what you've read, we hope that you'll join with us in building a network of active duty organizers.  
<http://www.traveling-soldier.org/>

## **TROOP NEWS**

**BE ADVISED:  
Army Times Story Says  
Fatal Disease Is Not Life  
Threatening!**

From Army Times Story Dec. 29, 2003



Some members of the Army Reserve's 296th Transportation Company, based in Mississippi, apparently are infected with a parasitic disease contracted in Iraq, the company commander said.

"Many of my soldiers, including myself, have it," Capt. Howard Taylor told The Daily Leader newspaper of Brookhaven, Miss.

**Leishmaniasis, known as "Baghdad Boil" to U.S. soldiers, is a skin disease transmitted by bites from sand flies in Iraq.** It can leave disfiguring lesions on the skin for months. The disease is more common in rural than urban areas of Iraq, but is found on the outskirts of some cities, *according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta. While the disease is serious, it is not life-threatening.*

# NOW READ WHAT THE CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL REALLY SAID, AND IT'S NOT THE DEADLY BULLSHIT ABOVE

<http://www.cdc.gov/travel/diseases/leishmaniasis.htm>

## Clinical Presentation

Cutaneous leishmaniasis is characterized by one or more skin sores (either painful or painless, with or without a scab) that develop weeks to months after a person is bitten by infected sand flies. If untreated, the sores can last from weeks to years and often eventually develop raised edges and a central crater. The manifestations of visceral leishmaniasis, such as fever, weight loss, enlargement of the spleen and liver, and anemia, typically develop months, but sometimes years, after a person becomes infected.

***If untreated, symptomatic visceral leishmaniasis typically is fatal.***

# WHAT THE FUCK DO THEY THINK “FATAL” MEANS?

Do you have a friend or relative in the service? Forward this E-MAIL along, or send us the address if you wish and we'll send it regularly. Whether in Iraq or stuck on a base in the USA, this is extra important for your service friend, too often cut off from access to encouraging news of growing resistance to the war, at home and in Iraq, and information about other social protest movements here in the USA. Send requests to address up top. For copies on web site see: <http://www.notinourname.net/qi-special/>

## BUSH DENYING SOLDIERS THEIR DEPLOYMENT PAY: SOLDIER-HATING CRIMINAL IN THE WHITE HOUSE AT IT AGAIN

December 29, 2003 By Vince Crawley, Army Times Staff Writer

**Congress may have approved a special deployment allowance worth up to \$600 per month, but it's unclear when — if ever — the Defense Department might begin paying it.**

In the meantime, hundreds of thousands of U.S. troops will have served in Iraq, Afghanistan and elsewhere on the kind of lengthy deployments the new allowance is designed to address.

The new allowance would start paying \$200 per month to anyone deployed more than 191 days in a row. The pay can reach \$600 per month for someone deployed more than 211 days in a row and more than 450 cumulative days out of the previous two years.

**Yet the Defense Department hasn't decided when to start counting those deployed days, and some services propose waiting until the end of the war on terrorism.** President Bush has said the conflict could last at least until the end of the decade.

So-called “deployment clocks” were halted in the weeks after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks because of the national emergency declared by Bush and never have been restarted.

Pentagon personnel officials plan to begin talks in January on how to best compensate service members for lengthy and frequent deployments. But they will discuss a range of options, such as boosting hardship-duty pay, along with whether to restart deployment clocks.

**Most officials anticipate that even if the freeze on deployment clocks is lifted, they'd be reset to zero and past deployment days would not count.**

**A House Armed Services Committee aide said the Defense Department decision to delay counting deployment time comes as “no surprise.”**

**“I would not be shocked, quite frankly, if nobody ever received this pay,” the aide said in December. “I don’t see deployed days being counted until the global war on terrorism is declared over — if that were to ever actually happen.”**

Congress approved the new allowance as part of the 2004 Defense Authorization Act, following almost exactly the eligibility rules proposed by the Defense Department. Bush signed the legislation into law Nov. 24.

While revising eligibility rules, **lawmakers left intact a provision allowing defense officials to suspend counting deployed days based on national-security needs . Congress even added new waiver authority, allowing the Defense Department to declare that certain deployed days will not count for people with certain skills or in certain units.**

***This extra loophole, requested by the Bush administration, is large enough to prevent people in units that deploy the most from ever receiving the allowance, congressional aides said.***

(Said it before, say it again: The soldiers’ enemies aren’t in Iraq, they’re running the U.S. government. Check out how Democrats and Republicans both agreed to put the loophole in the law that lets Bush and Rumsfeld get away with this. If you know anybody who still buys that stupid “Anybody But Bush” bullshit the Democrats are peddling, jam this one down their throat. Or in another convenient orifice.)

**THE WORKERS FLAG IS PALEST PINK  
A GREAT IMPROVEMENT, DON'T YOU THINK?  
SO LIFT IT UP, BUT NOT TOO HIGH !  
WE'LL GIVE THE DEMOCRATS A TRY**

(If you have had quite enough of Democrat and Republican scheming to fuck over everybody who isn’t a millionaire, check out [www.socialistworker.org](http://www.socialistworker.org).)

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## **Fighting The Pentagon Pay Fraud;**

# 94% Screwed; Where To Report Your Problem

Army Times 12.29.03

Congressional investigators who have launched three separate reviews of pay problems encountered by mobilized National Guard and reserve members are asking the victims themselves for help.

**The General Accounting Office already found that 94 percent of mobilized National Guard personnel had experienced problems with military pay.**

Investigators now are expanding their work to look at three other issues: **pay problems among reservists, delays in travel reimbursement and difficulties for reservists who are extended on active duty for medical reasons.**

<p>Guard and reserve members with pay problems may contact investigators by e-mail at <a href="mailto:fraudnet@gao.gov">fraudnet@gao.gov</a>.</p>
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## Payday Loan Vultures At Work

Army Times, Dec. 29, 2003

**Spc. Maurice Burden, a Stinger missile crewman, didn't realize an enemy in the United States would jeopardize his security clearance — debt.**

He took out a \$400 payday loan in July from one of the lenders lining the streets near Fort Bliss, Texas, where he is stationed.

**Burden didn't have the money to pay back the loan and, a week after the due date, his savings were wiped out. Desperate, he applied for another loan to cover the costs, which only got him deeper in trouble.**

"I think my account got up to negative \$1,700 at one point," he said of his checking account.

Military bases across the nation are magnets for so-called payday lenders, which make money charging fees as high as \$30 every two weeks per \$100 borrowed — equal to a 720 percent annual interest rate.

**Nearly a tenth of the 10,000 active-duty soldiers at Fort Bliss have talked to the financial counselor at the post's Community Service Center about debt problems, said Janice Gamel, an Army emergency relief officer.**

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# Commissary Double Talk

Editorial

Army Times December 29, 2003

**Here's what Pentagon officials want you to think about their plans for military commissaries, taken from an official Defense Department news release: "Most commissaries are not closing ... recent media coverage is 'slanted and inaccurate.' "**

**Here's what Pentagon officials are saying to subordinates in internal memos: "Please submit plans to close" eight commissaries in fiscal 2004.**

Another memo argues for removing the three-star chairman of DoD's commissary operating board and replacing him with a DoD official.

Defense officials can dismiss news reports on these memos as slanted, but they cannot deny their own words. **Their memos clearly spell out a desire to close some stores and perhaps eliminate potential impediments to those plans, such as a three-star military chairman of an oversight board.**

Some seven weeks after this newspaper first sought input from senior defense officials on the commissaries, the Pentagon finally offered time with John Molino, chief of military community and family policy. His explanation was that the memo on store closings merely was a "poor choice of words" and said DoD is reconsidering the fate of the eight stores cited.

He said nothing to refute the facts as reported by this newspaper.

**Pentagon officials can spin this story any way they like. But the facts speak for themselves.**

**"Slanted and inaccurate"? That's what you get with happy stories planted in military-controlled media suggesting all is well with the commissaries.**

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## "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" Don't Work

Army Times 12.29.03

*(A comment on the opinion column on the Oct. 27 Back Talk page: "Don't ask, don't tell": 10 years, 2 views." by Moskos opposing gays in service.)*

"Don't ask, don't tell" works only in the sense that certain people want it to work. The basic policy, and the law describing that policy, is internally inconsistent. When the law was written, the right-wingers insisted that the law state clearly that homosexuality is incompatible with military service.

But if homosexuality is inconsistent with military service, gays should not be allowed to serve, even if they keep their mouths shut. That is why the conservatives insisted on this language.

Moskos argues in circles. He states that “those who argue that the military should allow gays to serve openly are asking the military to break the law.” This is absolutely untrue. “They” argue that the military should press for the law to be changed.

**Yes, Defense Department regulations state that hostile treatment against a service member based on “perception of his or her sexual orientation will not be tolerated.” Nice statement of intent, but lacking in application. A private at Fort Campbell, Ky., had his head caved in with a baseball bat, because his fellow soldiers thought he was gay.**

**In addition, I disagree with Moskos that the analogy to the ending of racial discrimination in the Army is not appropriate. The same fallacious arguments were used against racial integration in the late 1940s: unit cohesion, can’t swim in the same swimming pool, etc.**

**The nongay soldiers who do not wish to shower with gay soldiers are ideological descendants of those white soldiers who did not wish to live in the same barracks, eat at the same table or swim in the same swimming pool with black soldiers.**

These recalcitrant racists either adjusted or left the service. In the current generation, I believe there are fewer rabid homophobes in the population at large (and in the Army) than there were rabid racists in the 1940s.

I resent Moskos’ analogy to Winston Churchill’s comment about democracy being the worst system possible, except for all the others, which is a statement I agree with. That is not the case with Don’t ask, don’t tell. There are many better ways to deal with the problem. Most of these potential solutions are probably not politically feasible at present.

**Ending slavery throughout the United States was not feasible in 1860. But slavery was still wrong at that time. Don’t ask, don’t tell is wrong at this time. And we should continue trying to change it.**

Col. R. M. Balzhiser (ret.)  
New York

**What do you think? Comments from service men and women, and veterans, are especially welcome. Send to the E-mail address up top. Name, I.D., withheld on request. Replies confidential.**

**FORWARD OBSERVATIONS**

# Resistance

Brethren, arise, arise! Strike for your lives and liberties. Now is the day and the hour. Let every slave throughout the land do this and the days of slavery are numbered. Rather die freemen than live to be slaves!

In the name of God we ask, are you men? Where is the blood of your fathers? Awake, awake, millions of voices are calling you! **Let your motto be resistance; no oppressed people have secured their liberty without resistance.**

Henry Highland Garnet,  
Buffalo Convention of Colored Citizens  
Buffalo, New York  
1843

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## OCCUPATION REPORT

### “Fuck Saddam And Fuck The USA”

By Robert Fisk in Baghdad 27 December 2003

An American-paid Iraqi cop was guarding the crumbling brick house in which the bodies of the newly dead are washed before being taken to the morgue. Inside were two new corpses, the dead of Christmas Eve, newly arrived from the town of Beiji.

**"Don't talk to the relatives," the policeman said. "Both men were killed by the Americans. One worked in a factory and was caught in the open when the resistance fired at American soldiers. The Americans shot everyone they saw.** The people are angry because you look like an American." But they all shook hands and stood in front of us with their heads bowed and asked why the tragedy of Iraq was growing worse.

**The cop wanted the last word. "Saddam brought us to this tragedy and the Americans used it," he said. "You want to know who is to blame? I say this: Fuck Saddam and fuck the USA."**

<p><b>OCCUPATION ISN'T LIBERATION BRING ALL THE TROOPS HOME <u>NOW!</u></b></p>
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# OCCUPATION PALESTINE

## Three Stories From The Walls; What Occupation Feels Like.

John Berger

John Berger went to Ramallah in June. His most recent book, *Shape of a Pocket*, is published by Bloomsbury

Husni al-Nayjar, 14 years old. He worked helping his father who was a welder. While flinging stones, he was shot dead with a bullet to the head. In his photo he gazes calmly and unwaveringly into the middle distance.

Abdelhamid Kharti, 34 years old. Painter and writer. When young, he had trained as a nurse. He volunteered to join a medical emergency unit for rescuing and taking care of the wounded. His corpse was found near a checkpoint, after a night when there had been no confrontations. His fingers had been cut off. A thumb was hanging loose. An arm, a hand and his jaw were broken. There were twenty bullets in his body.

Muhammad al-Durra, 12 years old, lived in the Breij Camp. He was returning home with his father across the Netzarin checkpoint in Gaza and they were ordered to get out of their vehicle. Soldiers were already shooting. The two of them took immediate cover behind a cement wall. The father waved to show they were there and was shot in the hand. A little later Muhammad was shot in the foot. The father now shielded his son with his own body. More bullets hit both, and the boy was killed. Doctors removed eight bullets from the father's body, but he has been paralysed as a consequence of the wounds and is unable to work. Because the incident happened to be filmed, the story is told and retold across the world.

I want to do a drawing for Abdelhamid Kharti. Very early in the morning I go to the village of Ain Kinya. Beyond it there's a Bedouin encampment, near a wadi. The sun is not yet hot. The goats and sheep are grazing more or less between the tents. I've chosen to draw the hills looking eastwards. I sit on a rock near a small blackish tent. I have only a notebook and this pen. There's a discarded plastic mug on the earth and it gives me the idea of fetching some water from the trickle of the spring to mix, when necessary, with my ink.

After I've been drawing for a while, a young man (every invisible person in the camp has of course noticed me) approaches, undoes the entrance to the tent behind me, enters and comes out holding up a decrepit white plastic stool which, he indicates, might be more comfortable than the rock. I guess that before he found it, it must have been thrown out into the street by some pastry shop or ice-cream parlour. I thank him.

Sitting on this customer's stool in the Bedouin camp, as the sun gets hotter and the frogs in the almost dry riverbed begin to croak, I go on drawing. On a hilltop, a few kilometres to the left, is an Israeli settlement. It looks military, as if it were part of a weapon, designed for quick handling. Yet it's small and far away. The near limestone hill facing



me has the form of a gigantic sleeping animal's head, the rocks scattered on it like burrs in its matted hair. Suddenly frustrated by my lack of pigment, I pour water from the mug on to the dust at my feet, dip my finger into the mud and smear colour across the drawing of the animal's head. The sun is hot now. A mule brays. I turn the page of the notebook to begin another and another. Nothing looks finished. When the young man eventually returns, he wants to see my drawings.

I hold up the open notebook. He smiles. I turn a page. He points. 'Ours,' he says, 'our dust!' He's pointing at my finger, not the drawing.

Then we both look at the hill.

I am among not the conquered but the defeated, whom the victors fear. The time of the victors is always short and that of the defeated unaccountably long. Their space is different, too. Everything in this limited land is a question of space, and the victors have understood as much. The stranglehold they maintain is first and foremost spatial. It is applied, illegally and in defiance of international law, through the checkpoints, through the destruction of ancient roads, through the new bypasses strictly reserved for Israeli settlers, through the fortress hilltop settlements, which are really surveillance and control points for the surrounding plateau, through the curfew which obliges people to stay indoors night and day until it is lifted. During the invasion of Ramallah last year, the curfew lasted six weeks, with a 'lifting' of a couple of hours on certain days for shopping. There was not even enough time to bury those who died in their beds.

The dissenting Israeli architect Eyal Weizman has pointed out in a courageous study that this total terrestrial domination begins in the drawings of district planners and architects (see [www.opendemocracy.net](http://www.opendemocracy.net)). On such drawings not a speck of 'our dust' is to be seen. The violence begins long before the arrival of the tanks and jeeps. He talks of a 'politics of verticality', whereby the defeated even when 'at home' are being overseen and undermined. The effect of this on daily life is relentless. As soon as somebody one morning says to himself, 'I'll go and see . . .' he has to stop short and check how many barrier-crossings the 'outing' is likely to involve. The simplest everyday decision is hobbled, its foreleg tethered to its hind leg.

In addition, because the barriers change unpredictably from day to day, the experience of time is hobbled. Nobody knows how long it will take to get to work this morning, to go and see their mother, to attend a class, to consult a doctor; or, having done these things, how long it will take to get back home. The trip, in either direction, may take thirty minutes or four hours, or the route may be categorically shut off by soldiers with their loaded submachine guns.

The Israeli Government claims that it is obliged to take these measures to combat terrorism. The claim is a feint. The true aim of the stranglehold is to destroy the indigenous population's sense of temporal and spatial continuity so that they either leave or become indentured servants. And it's here that the dead help the living to resist. It's here that men and women make their decision to become martyrs. The stranglehold inspires the terrorism it purports to be fighting.

A small road of stones, negotiating boulders, descending into a valley south of Ramallah. Sometimes it winds between groves of old olive trees, a number perhaps dating from Roman times. This rocky track (very hard on any car) is the only means of

access for Palestinians to their nearby village. The original asphalt road, forbidden to them now, is reserved for Israelis in the settlements. I walk ahead because all my life I have found it more tiring to walk slowly. I spot a red flower among the shrubs and stop to pick it. Later I learn it is called *Adonis aestivalis*. Its red is very intense and its life, the botanical book says, brief.

Baha shouts to warn me not to head towards the high hill on my left. If they spot someone approaching, he shouts, they shoot. I try to calculate the distance: less than a kilometre. A couple of hundred metres away in the unrecommended direction I spot a tethered mule and horse. I take them as a guarantee and I walk there. Where I arrive, two boys - aged about eleven and eight - are working alone in a field. The younger one is filling watering-cans from a barrel buried in the earth. The care with which he does so, not spilling a drop, shows how precious the water is. The elder boy takes the full can and carefully climbs down to a ploughed plot where he is watering plants. Both of them are barefoot.

The one watering beckons to me and proudly shows me the rows of several hundred plants on the plot. Some I recognise: tomatoes, aubergines, cucumbers. They must have been planted during the last week. They're still small, searching for water. One plant I don't recognise and he realises this. 'Big light,' he says. 'Melon?' 'Shumaam!' We laugh. We are both - God knows why - living at the same moment. He takes me down the rows to show me how much he has watered. At one moment we pause, look around and glance at the settlement with its defensive walls and red roofs. As he points with his chin in its direction there is a kind of derision in his gesture, a derision which he wants to share with me, like his pride in watering. A derision which gives way to a grin - as if we had both agreed to piss at the same moment at the same spot.

Later we walk back towards the rocky road. He picks some short mint and hands me a bunch. Its pungent freshness is like a draught of cold water, water colder than that in the watering-can. We are going towards the horse and mule. The horse, unsaddled, has a halter with reins but neither bridle nor bit. He wants to demonstrate to me something more impressive than an imaginary piss. He leaps onto the horse while his brother reassures the mule, and almost instantly he is galloping, bareback, down the road from which I came. The horse has six legs, four of its own and two belonging to its rider, and the boy's hands control all six. He rides with the experience of several lifetimes. When he returns, he is grinning and, for the first time, looks shy.

I rejoin Baha and the others who are a kilometre away. They are talking to a man, who is the boy's uncle, and who is likewise watering plants which have been recently bedded out. The sun is going down and the light is changing. The brownish yellow earth, which is darker where it has been watered, is now the primary colour of the whole landscape. He is using the last of the water in the bottom of a 500-litre dark blue plastic barrel. On the surface of the blue barrel 11 patches - like those used for mending punctures but larger - have been carefully stuck. The man explains that this is how he repaired the barrel after a gang from the settlement of Halamish, the settlement with red roofs, came one night, when they knew the water containers were full of spring rain, and slashed them with knives. Another barrel, lying on the terrace below, was irreparable. Further off on the same terrace stands the gnarled stump of an olive tree, which, to judge by its girth, must have been several hundred, perhaps a thousand, years old. A few nights ago, the uncle says, they cut it down with a chainsaw.

Later, I find a poem by Zakaria Mohammed called 'The Bit'. It talks about a black horse without a bridle which has blood dripping from its lips. With Zakaria's horse, too, there is a boy, astonished by the blood.

What is the black horse chewing?

he asks,

What does it chew?

The black horse

is biting

a bit forged from steel

a bit of memory

to be champed on

champed on until death.

If the boy who gave me the short mint were seven years older, it wouldn't be hard to imagine why he might join Hamas, ready to sacrifice his life.

The weight of the smashed concrete slabs and fallen masonry of Arafat's wrecked compound in the centre of Ramallah has taken on a symbolic quality. Not, however, in the way the Israeli commanders imagined. Smashing the Muqata with Arafat and his company in it was for them a public demonstration of his humiliation, just as in the private apartments which the Army systematically raided and searched, the tomato ketchup smeared onto clothes, furniture and walls was a private warning of worse to come.

The light comes down from the sky in a strangely regular way, making no distinction between what is distant and what is close. The difference between far and near is one of scale, never of colour, texture or precision. And this affects the way you place yourself, it affects your sense of being here. The land arranges itself around you, rather than confronting you. It's the opposite of Arizona. Instead of beckoning, it recommends never leaving.

And so I am here, unintentionally fulfilling a dream that some of my ancestors in Poland, Galicia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire must have nurtured and spoken about for at least two centuries. And here I find myself defending the justice of the Palestinian cause against people who may be cousins of mine, and anyway against the state of Israel. Those who have been chased out, and those whom there are plans to chase out, are inseparable from the land's living pulse. Without them, this dust will have no soul. That's not a figure of speech, it's the gravest warning.

Riad, who is a teacher of carpentry, has gone to fetch his drawings. We are sitting in the garden of his father's house. The father with his white horse is harrowing the field opposite. When Riad comes back he's carrying the drawings like a file taken out of an old-fashioned metal filing cabinet. He walks slowly and the chickens move out of his way more slowly. He sits opposite me and hands me the drawings one by one. They are drawn with a hard-lead pencil, from memory and with great patience. Stroke on stroke, in the evenings after work until the blacks become as black as he wants, the grays remaining silvery. They are on quite large sheets of paper. A drawing of a water pitcher. A drawing of his mother. A drawing of a house which was destroyed, of windows that gave onto rooms which have gone.

When I at last put the drawings down, an older man with the face of a peasant addresses me. 'It sounds as if you know about chickens,' he says. 'When a hen falls ill, she stops laying. Little to be done. One day, though, she wakes up and feels death approaching. One day she realises she's going to die, and what happens? She begins laying again, and nothing but death can stop her. We are like that hen.'

The checkpoints function as interior frontiers imposed on the Occupied Territories, yet they do not resemble any normal frontier-post. They are constructed and manned in such a way that everyone who passes is reduced to the status of an unwelcome refugee. Impossible to overestimate the importance for the stranglehold of decor, used as a constant reminder of who are the victors and who should recognise that they are the conquered. Palestinians have to undergo, often several times a day, the humiliation of playing the part of refugees in their own land.

Everyone crossing has to walk on foot past the checkpoint, where soldiers, loaded guns at the ready, pick on whoever they wish to 'check'. No vehicles can cross. The traditional road has been destroyed. The new obligatory 'route' has been strewn with boulders, stones and other minor obstacles. Consequently, all, even the fit, have to hobble across. The sick and elderly are pushed in wooden boxes on four wheels (boxes originally made for carting vegetables in the market) by young men, who earn a small living like this. They hand each passenger a cushion to soften the bumps. They listen to their stories. They always know the latest news (the barriers alter every day).

They offer advice, they lament and they are proud of the little aid they offer. They are perhaps the nearest to a chorus in the tragedy. Some 'commuters' walk with the aid of a stick, some even on crutches. Everything which would normally be in the boot of a vehicle has to be hoiked across in bundles carried by hand or on the back. The distance of a crossing can change overnight from anything between 300 and 1500 metres.

Palestinian couples, except for certain more sophisticated young ones, generally observe in public the decorum of a certain distance. At the checkpoints couples of all ages hold hands as they cross, searching with each step for a foothold, and calculating exactly the right pace for hobbling past the pointing guns, neither too fast - hurrying can arouse suspicion - nor too slow: hesitation can lead to a 'game', which will relieve the chronic boredom of the guards.

The vindictiveness of some (not all) Israeli soldiers has little to do with the cruelty which Euripides described and lamented, for here the confrontation is not between equals, but between the all powerful and the apparently powerless. Yet this power of the powerful is accompanied by a furious frustration: the discovery that, despite all their weapons, their power has an inexplicable limit.

I want to change some euros for shekels - the Palestinians have no currency of their own. I walk down the main street passing many small shops, and, occasionally, a man sitting on a chair, where there would once, before the invasion of the tanks, have been a pavement. In their hands these men hold wads of bank-notes. I approach a young one and say I want to change 100 euros. (For that amount one could buy in one of the gold shops a small bracelet for a child.) He consults a child's pocket calculator and hands me several hundred shekels.

I walk on. A boy who, age-wise, might be the brother of the girl with the imaginary golden bracelet, holds out chewing-gum for me to buy. He is from one of the two refugee camps in Ramallah. I buy. He's also selling plastic covers for the magnetic ID cards in the wallet. His scowl suggests I buy all the chewing-gum. I do.

Half an hour passes and I'm in the vegetable market. A man is selling garlic the size of electric lightbulbs. There are many people close together. Somebody taps me on the shoulder. I turn round. It's the moneychanger. I gave you, he says, fifty shekels too little; here they are. I take five notes of ten. You were easy to find, he adds. I thank him. The expression in his eyes as he looks at me reminds me of an old woman I have seen the day before. An expression of great attention to the moment. Calm and considered, as if it could conceivably be the last moment. The money-changer then turns and begins his long walk back to the chair.

I met the old woman in the village of Kobar. The house was concrete, unfinished and sparse. On the walls of the bare salon were framed photographs of her nephew, Marwan Barghouti. Marwan as a boy, an adolescent, a man of forty. Today he is in an Israeli prison. If he survives, he is one of the few political leaders of Fatah with whom it will be essential to consult concerning any solid peace agreement.

While we were drinking lemon juice and the aunt was making coffee, her grandchildren came out into the garden: two boys aged about seven and nine. The younger one is called Homeland and the older one Struggle. They ran around in every direction and would suddenly stop, looking intently at one another, as if they were hiding behind something and peering out to see whether the other one had spotted them. Then they would move again to another invisible hide-out. A game they had invented and played together many times.

The third child was four years old. On his face were red and white daubs as on a clown's, and he stood apart like a clown, wistful, jokey, unsure when it would be over. He had chickenpox and knew he should not approach visitors.

When it came to saying goodbye, the aunt held my hand, and in her eyes there was this same special expression of attention to the moment. If two people are laying a tablecloth on a table, they glance at one another to check the placing of the cloth. Imagine the table is the world and the cloth the lives of those we have to save. Such was the expression.

**(To read more about out what life is like under a murderous military occupation by a foreign power, go to: [www.rafah.vze.com](http://www.rafah.vze.com). The foreign army is Israeli; the occupied nation is Palestine.)**

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