

# State-Sanctioned Paramilitary Terror in Basra Under British Occupation

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## Abstract

*Whilst Iraqi prime minister Maliki's spring offensive in Basra has provoked wide speculation about the extent to which it was an autonomous Iraqi government operation and on its success or lack of success in kerbing the power of the so-called Mahdi Army, the reported capture and execution of one of Basra's most important political figures has gone almost entirely unremarked. From the fragmentary record available, this article examines the role of Yussef Sinawee al Mosawi and his Thar Allah (God's Revenge) militia organisation. In the conflict between Thar Allah and the Basra governor's Fadhila (Virtue) party it is possible to identify a political schism that lies at the heart of Iraq's future, both in terms of ongoing efforts towards Balkanisation and the theft of its oil industry. An examination of Thar Allah and its relations with the world of covert operations also reveals a great deal about the extent of British involvement in the violence that has racked this economically vital city and suggests how counterinsurgency warfare plays an essential role in continuing politics by other means.*

## The Life, Murderous Times and Enigmatic Death of Sayed Yussef Sinawee al Mosawi

### The Enigmatic Death

On 20 April 2008 it was reported on the website *al Badeel al Iraqi* that the leader of the Thar Allah militia Yusuf Mosawi had been executed in Baghdad under the supervision of Abu Mujahid, an adviser to Iraqi Prime Minister Maliki(1).

Few in the west are likely to have even heard of the Thar Allah (God's Revenge) organisation, let alone its chairman, Sayed Yussef Sinawee al Mosawi, yet the detention of this militia-commander-cum-radical-Shiite-cleric as part of the much-slated 'Knights Assault' in Basra in March was important enough within the politics of contemporary Iraq to warrant mention by both the Oil Minister Shahristani(2) and the prime minister himself, speaking in an interview on CNN(3).

If it is true that Mosawi has indeed been executed, whilst many Iraqis might well breathe a sigh of relief, it is beyond any doubt that his killing after just some two weeks' detention constitutes yet another political murder to add to the thousands upon thousands of others of which Mosawi and Thar Allah may very well be a part.

Even amid the chaotic politics and genocidal violence that has gripped Iraq from the outset of the Anglo-American occupation, an examination of the extremist Shiite militia Thar Allah may well offer seriously concerned onlookers an opportunity to see beyond the popular media paradigms of 'sectarian civil war' and the 'oil and militia' politics of the south.

## **Murderous Times**

Thar Allah is said to have been one of four new Islamist organisations that opened offices in Basra in October 2003.(4) Although Thar Allah has been almost exclusively identified with the internal politics of Basra, it was reported that the organisation already had additional offices in Nasiriyah, Missan and Talha, and intended to open others in Baghdad, Diwaniya and Karbala.(5) In fact, it was subsequently reported that an armed group operating in Baghdad and Tikrit going by the name Thar Allah issued a statement on 1 November 2003 in which it claimed that its membership was drawn from 'all the factions of Iraqi people'. The group is recorded as issuing a statement in which it claimed to be 'hunting down and killing supporters of the Saddam Hussein regime, specifically those who worked in the security and intelligence services'.(6)

It seems extremely likely that this is in fact the same or a related organisation to the 'militant Shia' Thar Allah that appears in Basra less than two weeks later under the leadership of Sayed Yussif al Mosawi, who claims that 'We have confirmed information that groups from al-Qaeda, dozens of them, have crossed the borders from Kuwait and Saudi Arabia ... [and] are here to coordinate with former Saddam men.'(7)

It is precisely at this time that a second wave of killings of members of the former government begins in Basra, with 12 recorded deaths in October alone.(8) From this savage new beginning, these killings are linked with a White Toyota Sedan without plates that will later become identified as the Death Car.(9)

At almost exactly the same time that Thar Allah pops up in Basra and murders of Baathists begin, the British are known to have been not merely deploying raw police onto Basra's streets, but building up a new intelligence apparatus(10), initially identified as the Special Operations Department(11), based at the Jameat police station. The head of this 'hard but effective'(12) 45-man unit was a former member of another Shiite militia, the Badr Brigade, associated with one of the main exiled Iraqi opposition parties (now a major part of government), the Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq (SCIRI)(13), yet a murky relationship between Thar Allah and the Special Operations Department already existed. According to anonymous interviews with 'coalition intelligence and military officials' conducted by Knights and Williams on behalf of the Western Institute for Near East Policy (WINEP) in 2006:

*While Badr elements in police intelligence identified former Baathists and detained some in unauthorized prisons, other SCIRI-affiliated movements used police supplied intelligence to undertake targeted killings of Sunnis and Shiites accused of Baath-era crimes. The best known of these organisations was Thar Allah... [Although British forces had strong indicators to suggest such activities were carried out by SCIRI-affiliated groups, the movement's careful courting of the coalition and its use of 'cutouts' such as the police intelligence unit and Thar Allah shielded it from further scrutiny.](14)*

However much British forces had been hoodwinked by SCIRI, it is clear that they were aware

of the crimes being committed by their own Special Operations Department, as well as Thar Allah. In fact, by early 2004 such crimes had become so apparent that even *The Sunday Times* was accusing the British-backed Police Intelligence of killing former Baath Party members(15), while the Western media in general had recognised that 'groups posing as Islamic parties', including Thar Allah, were meting out brutal street justice, including tracking down former Baathists, running illegal checkpoints, conducting house searches and punishing those 'deemed to have flouted Islamic customs'.(16)

Leaving the Special Operations Department aside for now, given such appearance, the recorded behaviour of British forces towards Thar Allah appears all the more remarkable. One incident in autumn 2003 involved the arrest of six alleged Baathist 'insurgents' by Thar Allah, who apparently confessed on videotape to a number of bombings. The men were held in 'hopes of tracing the remaining plotters' (for which we should undoubtedly read tortured) until the intervention of British forces, who arrested both the six Baathists along with 13 members of Thar Allah, but the Thar Allah militiamen were all released the following day.(17)

By March 2004, British officials still claimed that Thar Allah and other Shiite political groups had generally behaved responsibly.(18) Yet less than a week later, it briefly appeared that British forces had had a change of heart when they are reported to have attempted to evict Thar Allah from its illegally occupied headquarters(19) and confiscated light weapons.(20) But once again, Thar Allah was quickly let off the hook, with the 'coalition apologising to the group and returning its weapons'.(21) In relation to this leniency and in spite of their obligations under International Law, one British officer had this to say: 'We are not in the business of charging around arresting people'. Basra's deputy police chief was even more candid in regard to Thar Allah: 'we share the same views and they help us with security'.

For the remainder of 2004 Thar Allah and its leader Yussef Mosawi seems to disappear from view, presumably left to continue helping the police with security, detaining and murdering former Baathists, imposing brutal street justice a la Sharia law and generally contributing to the 'scores, possibly hundreds' of political assassinations that had been reported by May.(22) Nonetheless, behind the scenes, changes were being made within Basra's intelligence apparatus. According to the journalist Stephen Grey, the British attempted to close down the Special Operations Department, but that 'despite their efforts, it returned in other guises', while the worst abuses were driven underground (at one point British forces discovered that it had been torturing prisoners in a nextdoor nightclub). By the end of the year, Grey records that the Special Operations Department had been renamed the Criminal Investigation Department. He also claims that the British had spent all year attempting to remove the Chief of Police, identified as Brigadier Ali. However, Ali had refused to go and had established an Internal Affairs Department run by a former Badr member that had been 'conducting an internal reign of terror inside the police'.(23) According to the US State Department, following allegations by the Iraqi police that Internal Affairs was responsible for the killings of 10 former Baathists, the chief of intelligence was removed in December, but retained command of Internal Affairs.(24) In so far as punitive action is concerned, from their anonymous interviews with British insiders, Knights and Williams report that when transition took place in June, British 'entreaties to cull the Jameat threatened deeply entrenched factional interests' and consequently fell on deaf ears. The result was that the 'many factional and sectarian murders committed by the Jameat went unpunished'(25).

Pausing to analyse the period to the end of 2004 briefly, we may note just how remarkable

these reports really are. What we are being told is that in the first six to eight months of occupation, the British occupiers of Basra built up an intelligence-based special police unit drawn from selected Shiite militiamen which, in conjunction with certain other paramilitary militia units, more or less instantly set about murdering its political opponents from the former government and imposing an extremist Islamist form of social cleansing. Having set this monster loose on the streets of Basra, British forces then not only failed to reign it in, but on two occasions behaved with what appears to be extraordinary leniency towards one of the associated paramilitary militias, Thar Allah, despite their ongoing obligation to provide security to the residents of Basra. In relation to such heinous derelictions of duty, British spokesmen's responses were to insist that 'we are not in the business of running around arresting people' and that 'violent deBaathification will come to its own conclusion'(26). Furthermore, despite the failed entreaties to 'cull the Jameat', following 'transition' Assistant Chief Constable Stephen White, a veteran from Northern Ireland, received an OBE for his role in setting up the policing structures in southern Iraq.(27)

## **A Political Life**

On 30 January 2005 Iraqis went to the polls. One of the candidates was Yussef Mosawi, running on behalf of the Thar Allah political party as part of the Coalition of Islamic Basra (*Al-Ittilaf al-Basra al-Islamiyya*), dominated by SCIRI. According to Knights and Williams, the January elections in Basra were 'marred by violent intimidation beforehand and equally brutal recriminations afterwards'.

But the 30 January elections did not mark Mosawi's formal entry into Basra's factious political scene. On 16 January an Iraqi newspaper had already recorded that:

*Al-Basra Council has decided to assign to Mr Youssif al-Mossowi, the member of the council and the head of the higher supervisory commission as a daily supervisor for working of checkpoints subordinating for Basra Police leadership...*

*Al-Mossowi said that his work has been done in coordination with Basra Police Leadership, especially during the night to monitor the negligence and duty elusion, confirming that this realized to guarantee security pre-elections period and ensure security during the election.(28)*

So the head of the Islamist Thar Allah militia organisation that had for the previous year been linked to political killings and social cleansing was not only running in the January elections, but *supervising* a political process described as being 'marred by violent intimidation beforehand and equally brutal recrimination afterwards'. On top of that, this man was the head of a 'higher supervisory commission' and ran the police checkpoints that must have allowed his and other paramilitary militiamen unimpeded access to their victims. It is beyond any reasonable doubt that by now British forces must have been fully cognizant of who Mosawi was and had endorsed his role on the higher supervisory commission, where they will undoubtedly have placed their agents and advisers. At this time, not one Iraqi police or military unit was even able to take the lead in operations and we must therefore assume absolutely the deep continuing involvement of British forces at every level of the security apparatus in Basra.(29)

In regard to the 'brutal recriminations afterwards', we may suggest that one of the chief reasons for the such recrimination was that, despite winning 20 of 41 seats on the Basra

Provincial Council, the Coalition of Islamic Basra was marginally outgunned by an alliance of the other main parties, dominated by Fadhila (a party of the Sadrist current that does not recognise Muqtada al Sadr as a source of authority). It was from Fadhila that the new governor, Muhamad al-Waeli was drawn, but power in Basra remained deeply divided and the influence of Mosawi and others remained substantial. In fact, according to Knights and Williams, it was precisely at this time that 'Using militiamen serving in the security forces, Sadrist factions and SCIRI affiliates such as Badr and Thar Allah accelerated their intimidation of local university professors, trade unionists, and other secular figures' to the extent that the early months of 2005 'witnessed unprecedented levels of political violence and crime'.(30) Again we must note this qualification that it is militiamen **servicing in the security forces** that are responsible for carrying out political violence and intimidation, ie it is the very OBE-worthy institutions established by the British that are responsible for the violence.

An example of this influence in action was demonstrated in what at the time was an extremely mysterious report in *The Telegraph*, describing negotiations on the appointment of a new chief of police between the governor and the head of Thar Allah. According to the report it was obvious that power lay with the 'bearded cleric puffing on a cigarette'.(31) The outcome of these negotiations is illuminating, for the new police chief, Hassan al-Sade, presumably Mosawi's favourite (a later source claims that Sade, a former officer in marine special forces, was appointed by Alawi(32)), was the former head of the British trained Tactical Support Unit(33) and a strong supporter of British 'attempts to purge the [police] force of militia elements'.(34)

Whilst the record for Thar Allah again largely goes quiet until October 2005(35), it is known that in response to the success of Fadhila, which at this time also held the Oil Ministry in Baghdad, Thar Allah became part of another SCIRI-led alliance, known as the Pentacle House (*al-Bayt al-Khumasi*), alongside the Badr Organisation, *Sayid al-Shuhada* (Master of Martyrs) and *Mu'assasat Shahid al-Mahrab* (another SCIRI affiliate). According to the International Crisis Group, 'Despite their tense relations, the Sadrists and SCIRI are informally allied against Fadhila' [and remember that it is exactly this combination of Sadrist factions and SCIRI affiliates which is blamed for the violence through its presence in the security forces!].(36)

The significance of the Pentacle House alliance rivalry with Fadhila and its allies is that it defines the key political schism in Basra. Most fundamental, the SCIRI-dominated position leads the charge for the creation of a Shiite super state in the south of Iraq(37), whilst Fadhila and its allies have supported an integrationist, nationalist position, despite assertions that the governor has complained about lack of resources reaching the south(38). The immediate goal of the Pentacle House alliance is the ousting of Governor Waeli.

In August Thar Allah once more emerges briefly, when it is accused of attempting to murder a former naval officer, indicating its continuing role in political violence. After the family of the naval officer successfully drove off Thar Allah, they were arrested by the police, detained and tortured for over a week.(39)

Before moving on to the most significant episode involving Thar Allah it is first necessary to examine the most spectacular event that took place in Basra in 2005 (at least through the prism of the western media) and which sparked the most dramatic and perhaps unexpected political crisis. In September, two undercover British service personnel in Arab disguise were

arrested by Iraqi police and detained at the Jameat police station(40). The two men were heavily armed (accusations were made that the car in which they were spotted contained bomb-making equipment) and opened fire on the Iraqi police in an attempt to avoid arrest. Rather than negotiate, answer questions about the identities or activities of the two agents or allow the Iraqi legal system to take its course, British forces instead chose to assault the Jameat and release the detainees by force. Several Iraqi civilians were shot dead in the angry protests that the assault provoked, with many Iraqis concluding that the two agents had been planning to plant a bomb in a civilian area(41). If British forces were not in the business of running around arresting people, it seemed that they were most definitely in the business of running around shooting Iraqis and destroying Iraqi infrastructure rather than face Iraqi scrutiny over the actions of top-secret paramilitary agents. In the event, despite the destruction to the Jameat itself, the two men were actually 'rescued' from another building to which they had been moved by armed militiamen under the nose of the presiding Iraqi judge. Curiously, following the snatch by 'militiamen' the two undercover operatives were better treated(42) and had been left entirely unguarded by the time that British forces recovered them, as though two sets of hands were at work within the Iraqi security apparatus!

The assault of the Jameat produced two obvious and hugely significant consequences. The first was that the governing council under the leadership of Governor Waeli immediately suspended cooperation with the British.

The second was that the governor ordered his own raid just weeks later on 22 October on the headquarters of Thar Allah. The circumstances and consequences of this raid were almost entirely unreported in the western media, but we can begin to reconstruct it from a number of partial reports, chief amongst which are a series of testimonials given to the Monitoring Net for Human Rights in Iraq and passed on to the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq.(43)

The first key point is that the raid appears to have been devised in response to allegations that government vehicles had been stolen or misused by Thar Allah, specifically in cases of abduction. The second key point is that the raid resulted in the discovery of some 50 illegal detainees (mostly Sunnis and some of them members of the Baath Party according to the testimonials) and the arrest of a similar number of paramilitary militiamen from the Iraqi Lions Movement, which appears to have operated from Thar Allah's headquarters. The militiamen are said to have confessed to carrying out 'rapes, robberies, assassinations, and to extorting money from business owners and university professors'. The third key point is that the police conducting the raid insisted that they had seized evidence implicating Iranian intelligence in recent violence in Basra, including armed attacks and plots to assassinate political leaders (including Governor Waeli). Unsurprisingly, a Thar Allah spokesman insisted that the raid had been politically motivated and that the governor had spread rumours that cars used to commit crimes had been seen near the mosque (HQ) to justify his actions. But perhaps most importantly, we learn from the testimonials that no mere militia commander, fundamentalist cleric, political councillor, head of higher supervisory commission nor overseer of night time checkpoints, Yussef Mosawi is also an official of the Interior Affairs department in the Jamiyat, where he is responsible for police vehicles!

Whatever the exact circumstances, this raid and arrests (reportedly including Mosawi) would appear to have provided an ideal opportunity for British forces to become involved in an effort to expose any Iranian involvement(44), clean up corruption, improve security and

perhaps repair relations with the governor. In the event, it seems that the British position was, if anything, obstructive and the raid is almost completely missing in the Western media. If we can assume that the governor did not order a second raid against Thar Allah in 2006, the ICG report *Lessons from Basra* claims that the governor ordered the army and the police to 'launch an offensive' against Thar Allah, but that the two generals in charge refused. The governor was forced to sign a new order, assuming entire responsibility for the operation, in order to carry out the raid. Whatever raid this passage refers to, the important point is that the two recalcitrant generals were the key British allies in Basra and must have discussed the matter with their British counterparts.

In late November, while British forces were conducting an 'underground campaign to stamp out the vicious bloodletting between Sunnis and Shiites'(45), the Ministry of the Interior sent a team with US advisors to shake up the Basra police.(46) The result was the reorganisation of Internal Affairs, with supposedly corrupt officers simply shifted to another department.(47)

The 'underground campaign' itself was described by Knights and Williams as follows:

*A wave of further arrests continued throughout the autumn of 2005 into early 2006, with British forces targeting a range of SCIRI, Sadrist and Thar Allah militia cells within the local police forces and municipal organs.(48)*

According to several authoritative subsequent write-ups it was this confluence of police intelligence and Thar Allah that the British had moved against. For instance:

*In September, British forces first moved against elements of Tharallah and the most corrupt units in the Basra constabulary, including the Department of Internal Affairs, the Criminal Intelligence Unit and the Serious Crimes Unit. Elements from these three organisations work with Tharallah to carry out contract killings and sophisticated roadside bomb attacks on British forces.(49)*

It sounded like a promising development from the perspective of the civilian population of Basra, yet the rate of killings actually escalated under the impact of the 'underground campaign', with the majority of attacks 'perpetrated by elements wearing Iraqi police uniform, as well as elements of a special force affiliated with the Iraqi Interior Ministry which was dissolved [ie Internal Affairs]' according to British military commander Alex Wilson.(50) And despite the campaign, Mosawi himself had reappeared to participate in the January 2006 elections.

By May the political crisis sparked after the assault on the Jameat was still not resolved. On 14 May the governor is reported to have organised a demonstration in support of his decision to suspend the chief of police, Hassan Sawadi, to demand the resignation of the new Iraqi Army's Basra-based 10th Division commandeer, General Abdul Latif Thaban and to blame two prominent Shiite clerics for a recent upsurge in violence.(51) It appears the governor's chief criticism had been failure to prevent the ongoing waves of extrajudicial killings.(52)

The day afterwards, 'in Basra, about 2000 followers of Shiite Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani marched in protest at allegations from the regional governor linking local clerics to terrorism.(53) Subsequently we learned that it was Mosawi that had been tasked with

organising and leading a demonstration to 'up the ante against Waeli that had 'degenerated into clashes'.(54)

On the same day as these demonstrations the new prime minister, Maliki, was establishing a special Basra Emergency Security Committee. The emergency committee is reported to have struggled to replace the provincial security committee until a compromise was reached with Waeli, whereby he would head a security committee selected by the prime minister from 'SCIRI, Fadhila and the Sadrist trend politicians'.(55) Unfortunately, we don't know whether Mosawi was appointed to the new security committee, but we do know that by February 2007 he had been appointed to the role of deputy governor(56) and by April 2008 he was described as a 'prominent and feared member of Basra's provincial council and security committee'!(57) If Britain's 'underground campaign' had been designed to curb violence it was an abject failure; if it had been designed to curb the power and influence of Thar Allah and Yussef Mosawi it was equally ineffectual. In fact, Thar Allah continued to operate with the same brazen sense of impunity.

In June 2006 in a predawn raid 20 gunmen dressed in commando camouflage are reported to have stormed a police station to free three members of Thar Allah charged with killing police officers.(58) Then in July, taking a break from killing Baathists and other political opponents, it was Yossef Mosawi who took charge of recruiting and enlisting militants to fight alongside Hezbollah guerrillas in Lebanon.(59)

The year of 2006 climaxed with yet another dramatic and seemingly inexplicable(60) episode under the auspices of Britain's latest effort to rehabilitate the police force and prepare for handover of authority, Operation Sinbad. On Christmas Day British forces conducted a second major assault on the Jameat police station (said to have been demolished the first time).(61) The huge military operation was now targeted primarily against the Serious Crimes Unit and culminated with the early morning demolition of the entire complex using bar mines. Whilst detainees were apparently rescued(62), computers were retrieved and the operation was touted as something of a success, it is difficult to entirely share the sense of jubilation. Despite or because of the huge military operation, the Serious Crimes Unit itself had already vacated the premises!(63) (The farce seems to have been entirely lost on most journalists, especially the BBC's Huw Williams, who claimed 'the demolition of the building was a visible symbol of the hope that the serious crimes carried out by police officers based there should now come to an end'!]) According to a Basra governate official, it was the Major Crimes Unit [sic] that had been penetrated both by Iranians and by Tha'r Allah members, while *The Times* agreed that the Serious Crimes Unit worked with Thar Allah to carry out contract killings and deadly roadside attacks.(64)

Following the arrest of just seven members of the 400-strong Serious Crimes Squad and its rehabilitation elsewhere under the new title of the Major Crimes Unit (No doubt for Huw Williams this would have constituted a semantic symbol of hope!), neither Thar Allah nor Yussef Mosawi disappeared from the scene. Equally, the conflict between Fadhila and the SCIRI-Thar Allah axis continued to simmer throughout 2007, with both SCIRI and Tha'r Allah calling in March for swift local elections in hopes of displacing Waeli.(65) These elections seem to have become the main focus of attention in 2007, with one Thar Allah commander stating that he had told all city council members that 'You have to make a choice. You either vote against the governor or you die'.(66) In August Mosawi himself claimed that 'We are prepared for the upcoming battle, and concrete barriers won't save [Fadhila],' and that if local elections 'aren't held, we will use force to kick Fadhila out'.(67) Thar Allah's centrality



was hinted at in several more articles in the Western media, which highlighted both the ready access to patronage that Mosawi was able to enjoy as well as his ongoing role in the paramilitary arena.(68) In September, Mosawi was actually able to roll out for a visiting journalist a classified map of the city prepared by the British military, showing the level of violence in July.(69) Though when asked how he had obtained the map, Mosawi joked 'They steal it for us', it seems much more likely that Basra's deputy governor had access to such maps from his role on the security committee, if not to any other official or quasi-official security appointments.

### **The Knights' Assault and the Sons of Basra**

Against a backdrop of ongoing violence, the stage appeared to be set for an epic confrontation between the SCIRI-Thar Allah axis and Fadhila. According to Mosawi:

*The local conflict cannot be separated from the broader struggle between West and East because of Basra's strategic location and vast resources ... Now, Basra is at the crossroads of an Iranian-American struggle, an Iranian-Arab struggle, the struggle between factions inside Iran and an American war against Islam as a whole. Every actor in this string of conflicts is striving to take up positions in Basra to influence the course of events. Iran is supporting the Islamist parties with which it has enjoyed longstanding ties, whereas the US is supporting local and regional forces that are capable of challenging Iran's influence.(70)*

One year after his geopolitical assessment, this 'powerful young warlord' had been arrested by Iraqi and Coalition forces during the major spring 2000 offensive known as the Knights' Assault.

So was this the 'upcoming battle' at the crossroads of so many struggles for which Thar Allah had been preparing, and could the seeming demise of this militant cleric popularly believed to have been an Iranian agent(71) at the hands of Iraqi and Coalition forces signal a victory in the East verses West, Iran verses America geopolitical conflict for influence?

Addressing the second question, we can say not if we are to believe Musawi, who apparently never saw himself or Thar Allah as one of the Iran-backed Islamist parties! In fact, Musawi accused just about everyone else, including Fadhila, of operating in the interests of Iran(72). But nor, apparently, did he see himself as an ally of the West, insisting that 'Coalition forces are usurpers, plunderers, and occupiers and must be resisted... I am doing that'.(73)

To the first question, the answer may yet well be yes. Whilst a great deal of speculation has surrounded the Knights' Assault(74), it's apparent failure and the apparent division it shows between prime minister Maliki and the US(75), it is very possible that most of the authors of such speculation have overlooked its critical dimensions in their haste to pigeonhole the current dynamic as anti-Sadrist (just as they insisted on pigeonholing previous dynamics as anti-al Qaeda or as sectarian conflict or even as attempts to stem 'sectarian violence'). In addition to ostensibly cracking down on Thar Allah, the offensive also targeted 'elements from al-Fadhila' and others(76). Among the moves was the disbanding of the Oil Protection Force, widely regarded as the military power base of Fadhila, and its replacement by an Interior Ministry controlled Oil Police(77).

These operations by a government which draws much of its support from one half of the SCIRI-Thar Allah axis may very well represent efforts to exert control in the two principle and

related issues that confront Iraq. The first issue is that of the upcoming provincial elections scheduled for October 2008, dominated in this region by the issue of the creation of a southern nine-province Shiite superstate whose existence will mark a major step on the road towards partition that so many imperialist ideologues have long advocated. Whilst Waeli appears pleased by the results of the Knights Assault, claiming that Basra is no longer dominated by 'militias'(78), it remains very much to be seen what the election will bring in terms of Iraq's future.

The second issue is the privatisation of Iraq's oil industry. With the moves against the Oil Protection Force and Fadhila, amid charges of smuggling, it appears Maliki may be attempting to unseat those forces that have stood in the way of a privatisation agenda that seems set to see the return of the same oil companies expelled by the Baath in 1972(79). Once again, only time will truly reveal how successful these efforts will be.

If Thar Allah and Yussef Mosawi have truly been removed from the scene, it is perhaps because they have already fulfilled their purpose, whatever agenda they may have believed it was they served. If we glance briefly at the record, insofar as it is known, of this fundamentalist Shiite paramilitary militia, it appears that Thar Allah functioned as one arm of a secret security apparatus that has been instrumental in eliminating the vestiges of the former state as well as carrying out a policy of sectarian cleansing that we are told has almost emptied Iraq's second city of its Sunni population(80) and enforcing an Islamic authoritarianism that must undoubtedly contribute to the suppression of dissenting voices.

It now appears that the reign of terror that Thar Allah and such other 'cutouts' as the police intelligence unit have imposed on Basra are likely to have served the long-term interests of both the architects of Iraq's Balkanisation and the oil majors looking for a 'foot in the door', since both these projects seem to have accorded with the SCIRI-Thar Allah axis. Perhaps it is small wonder then to learn from the *New York Times* That US intelligence agents were working with the intelligence unit in the Jameat, passing on 'tips, like the location of people suspected of being insurgents', knowing full well that they would find their way into the hands of Basra's death squads(81). Similarly, the explanation that Thar Allah and its cohorts wittingly or unwittingly operated in the interests of the occupation is the only possible serious explanation for the record of impunity that we encounter, especially including the return of arms to an organisation that had already been linked with political killings and the presence of its leader in key security positions.

In fact, for anyone who has looked at covert warfare and its role in counterinsurgency operations, the use of such paramilitary militias as an instrument of state policy is not only plausible, it is fundamental! The primary mechanism for conducting such intelligence-based counterinsurgency warfare is the consolidation of a specialist intelligence-gathering agency, which both provides the targets for and handles a range of paramilitary actors who carry out a strategy for which, out of political expediency (due to its fundamental illegality and immorality), the state must remain distanced. The US has carried out such strategies with great vigour in its interventionist wars in South-East Asia and Latin America. The victims, intended and unintended, run into hundreds of thousands. But it was Britain, as it was gradually divested of its colonial possessions after the Second World War, that wrote the modern handbook of counterinsurgency. Those who continue to doubt that the use of proxy paramilitaries, counter-terror and so-called pseudo operations are particularly 'British' or somehow outside the 'rules of cricket' should read the works of General Frank Kitson, who gained his experience dealing with 'civil revolts' in Kenya, Malaya, Oman, Cyprus and

Northern Ireland.(82)

It was Kitson's principles that were eventually to be deployed in the conflict in Northern Ireland and which led to the creation of a culture of collusion between the special branch of the RUC, a secretive military intelligence outfit known as the Force Research Unit and Loyalist Protestant paramilitaries in which Catholics could be murdered with impunity, according to the findings of the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Sir John Stevens(83). An account of the experience of this state-sanctioned violence by Jeffrey Slukka is deeply instructive for an understanding of the situation in Iraq.(84)

Just as in Iraq, we find that the popular media portrayal of this violence was to stereotype it as intercommunal sectarian violence. In Northern Ireland patient study and courageous investigation has revealed that far from constituting a cycle of 'tit for tat' revenge killings (the same label that is continually applied in Iraq), the majority of the victims were Catholic civilians murdered for the most part by serving and former members of the security forces, moonlighting in organisations that went by names like the Ulster Volunteer Force and Ulster Freedom Fighters.

Again, it may be of surprise to some to discover that even after the exposure of the activities of the Force Research Unit, action has not been taken to prosecute those responsible for creating the 'culture of collusion'; instead it seems that the unit has been shipped more or less wholesale to Iraq, where it plies its trade under the similarly innocuous sounding title of the Joint Support Group, with its primary mission being 'to recruit and run covert human intelligence sources or agents'.(85) In Northern Ireland such covert human intelligence sources or agents included paramilitary killers like Brian Nelson, head of intelligence for the Ulster Defence Association and Albert Baker, whose gang was responsible for the notorious 'Romper Room' murders.(86)

So if for a moment we step outside the media paradigm of rival Iranian-backed Shiite militias all competing over the smuggling of oil while simultaneously turning Basra into an Islamist hell, despite the best efforts of British forces, we can simply ask what should we expect the application of counterinsurgency warfare to look like in Basra. Put simply, we should expect to find a security committee at provincial level coordinating the combined efforts of a range of civil, military, police and para-military organisations. Below this we should expect to find some sort of centralised 'special branch' joint intelligence establishment that would include interrogation facilities, where British and/or American advisors would oversee an expansive intelligence gathering operation aimed not so much at 'terrorists' or individual fighters, but at the 'subversive' civilian 'infrastructure' of their political opponents, whether that be members of political parties or activists within supposed 'front' organisations, such as human rights agencies or trades unions. The 'intelligence' acquired primarily through interrogation would then be passed down to the various agencies, sometimes via 'cutouts', for target identification. At the extremity of this apparatus would be paramilitary units, specifically intended to maintain the maximum possible distance between the architects of the counterinsurgency policy and the application of this method of warfare.

In Basra we catch glimpses of a higher supervisory commission and security committee whose role is to coordinate security operations. We find a major intelligence operations facility established by the British housing a Special Operations Department-cum-Criminal Investigation Department where detainees are routinely interrogated/tortured. Here we find the presence of US intelligence agents/advisers, whose role is to compile lists of suspected

enemies. We find that the majority of 'militia violence' is carried out by agents who are at the same time members of the security forces. And we can just make out one specific paramilitary unit whose mandate includes eliminating members of the former ruling party on the pretext of security, whose leader enjoys privileged access to classified military maps and operates the nightly curfew, and which has been repeatedly and inexplicably nurtured by British forces. With this in mind, it is not hard to understand how a paradigm of failure, lack of planning, foreign infiltration, etc, etc must be preferred by the powerful to the only other conceivable alternative.

The execution of Yussef Mosawi, however deserved it may appear to have been, has done nothing to advance accountability or justice in post-invasion Iraq. Instead it must be seen as yet another political act of violence in a long and gruesome chain whose object is to protect the guilty and conceal the truth. In the absence of a far more thorough exposure of the secret war in Basra, it is foolhardy at the very least to attempt political analyses that cannot even establish the true relationships of the various actors.

To the consternation and embarrassment of the British state, the photograph of a number of British soldiers recently appeared in the *The Purple Standard*, a publication which praises the exploits of the outlawed Ulster Volunteer Force, a banned loyalist paramilitary group. The soldiers were pictured in Basra wearing orange sashes and playing flutes to their office, under the title 'The Rising Sons of Basra'.<sup>(87)</sup> As our eyes recover from the dazzling glow of the media spotlights and begin to accustom themselves to the dim world of paramilitary counterinsurgency warfare, we may begin to see that the Rising Sons of Basra are the Sons of Northern Ireland, are the Sons of Rhodesia, are the Sons of Kenya, are the Sons of Malaya, and are the Sons of every conflict where a blood-red sun refuses to finally set on the neo-colonial vestiges of Empire.

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## Footnotes

1. "Leader of Tharallah militia died under torture", Roads to Iraq, 20 April 2008 - URL: <http://www.roadstoiraq.com/2008/04/20/leader-of-tharallah-militia-died-under-torture/>
2. "Basra strike against Shiite militias also about oil", Sam Dagher, *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 April 2008
3. "Transcript: Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on Iraq", *CNN*, 7 April 2008
4. "Revenge Drives String of Killings in Basra", Joel Brinkley, *The New York Times*, 31 October 2003
5. RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs), IRQ42228.E, 15 January 2004, Immigration and Refugee Board Canada. There is no further indication of what happened to

these offices, but it is perfectly possible that they have continued in existence under the same or another name.

6. "A Survey of Armed Groups in Iraq", Kathleen Ridolfo, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 4 June 2004 [The URL of this article is no longer valid; a version of the same document can be found on Global Security, but the original reference to Tha'r Allah has been split into a non-descript sentence on Tha'r Allah and a separate entry for 'Vengeance Detachments' containing all the information originally attributed to Tha'r Allah. The version of the document that I first saw can still be obtained as a PDF from SmallWarsJournal.com. Whilst the original document is dated 4 June 2004, the PDF was created on 11 June 2005, which may suggest that the document was altered after that date - URL: <http://smallwarsjournal.com/documents/iraqsurvey.pdf>]

7. "Al-Qaeda scare has Basra on edge", Omar Hasan, *IOL*, 12 November 2003

8. "Revenge killings thin ex-Baathists' ranks", Joel Brinkley, *New York Times*, November 1, 2003

9. The first reference to a Death Car was made by Steven Vincent, a freelance American reporter, who wrote in August 2005 that a white Toyota Mark II was used by off-duty police officers in the pay of extremist religious group to perpetrate many of the 100s of assassinations in Basra each month ("Switched Off in Basra", 31 July 2005). Shortly after Vincent's highly critical report of British 'negligence' was published, Vincent was himself snatched by gunmen in a police vehicle and subsequently murdered. References to this and another make of car associated with death squad killings in Basra were made by an eye witness who linked them with the department of Internal Affairs (see endnote 46).

10. "Human rights protection and promotion vital in the transition period", Amnesty International, 28 June 2004.

11. "Iraqi Secret Police Operating in al-Basrah", Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, 30 January 2004

12. This glib comment was made by Capt Shay Marks, a British military spokesman. "Iraqi Party Goes From Exiled to Electable", Anthony Shadid, *Washington Post*, 14 February 2004

13. Now renamed simply the Simply Islamic Council for Iraq.

14. *The Calm Before the Storm: The British Experience in Southern Iraq*, Michael Knights and Ed Williams, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 66, February 2007, p15

15. "Iraqi Secret Police Operating in al-Basrah", *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 30 January 2004

16. "Iraqi Party Goes From Exiled to Electable", Anthony Shadid, *Washington Post*, February 14, 2004; "Iraqis Battle Gangs in Basra", Nicholas Blanford, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 24 March 2004; "Islamic groups' rise may lead to greater conflict", Jack Fairweather, *The Telegraph*, 7 April 2004. Incidents of what appeared to be Islamist social cleansing included a number of massacres of street alcohol vendors. When British forces intervened in one such incident on 1 February 2004, killing two of the attackers, they discovered that the 'militiamen' included a number of 'plainclothes police' that had teamed up with vigilantes; a British army spokesman, Shay Marks, insisted that the soldiers had stumbled upon a

plainclothes police operation cracking down on a criminal gang (“Killings of Vendors in Iraqi City Drive Alcohol Sales Off Streets”, Edward Wong, *The New York Times*, 18 February 2004).

17. “Iraqis battle gangs in Basra”, *Christian Science Monitor*, 24 March 2004.

18. *ibid.*

19. The headquarters may well have been the offices of a women’s rights organisation, said to have been taken over by Tha’r Allah in a later report; the women were threatened with death if they returned. “The Roots of Iraqi Secularism”, Healing Iraq, 12 October 2004 – URL: [http://healingiraq.blogspot.com/archives/2004\\_10\\_01\\_healingiraq\\_archive.html](http://healingiraq.blogspot.com/archives/2004_10_01_healingiraq_archive.html)

20. A Weekly Review of Developments in and Pertaining to Iraq, 2 April 2004, Volume 7, Number 12, RADIO FREE EUROPE/ RADIO LIBERTY; “One American killed in al-Falouja; Annan: work is underway to form a multinational force”, ArabicNews.com, 3/30/2004 – URL: <http://www.arabicnews.com/ansub/Daily/Day/040330/2004033012.html>

21. “Islamic groups’ rise may lead to greater conflict”, Jack Fairweather, *The Telegraph*, 7 April 2004

22. “Killings of civilians in Basra and al-‘Amara”, Amnesty International, 11 May 2004

23. “Iraq: our fatal blunder”, Stephen Grey, *New Statesman*, 3 October 2005”; some further observations were published by Stephen Grey in an internet photo diary now removed from the web.

24. “In Basra, Militia Controls by Fear”, Richard A Oppel Jr, *The New York Times*, 9 October 2005

25. *The Calm Before the Storm: The British Experience in Southern Iraq*, Michael Knights and Ed Williams, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 66, February 2007, p29

26. “Rule of the death squads”, Stephen Grey, *New Statesman*, 15 March 2004

27. “Officer honoured for Iraq role”, *BBC*, 12 June 2004

28. “Supervisory Commission to Control Chckpoints”, *Al Sabaah*, 16 January 2005 – URL: <http://horse.he.net/~swiftpow/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=14632&postdays=0&postorder=asc&start=60>

29. In May Britain’s senior police adviser, Deputy Chief Constable Colin Smith, another veteran from Northern Ireland, insisted that he was optimistic and that the ability of the Basra police force to patrol and investigate crimes was an ‘exponential development (“Basra out of control, says chief of police”, Rory Carroll, *The Guardian*, 31 May 2005). As late as September 2005, shortly before the arrest of 2 undercover SAS operatives, Chief Inspector Amanda Cooke, a senior British adviser to the Iraqi police in southern Iraq, absolutely refuted the accusation that the police in Basra had been thoroughly infiltrated by Shiite militiamen and took part in a campaign of assassination: ‘I’m 100 per cent sure that people [at Camp Apache] are working for the common good’ (“Camp Apache, the Iraqi police academy that relies on Britons”, Jonny Beardsall, *The Telgraph*, 22 September 2005).

30. *The Calm Before the Storm: The British Experience in Southern Iraq*, Michael Knights and Ed Williams, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 66, February 2007, p27
31. "Clerics become powerbrokers in the South", Jack Fairweather, *The Telegraph*, 14 February 2005
32. "Basra out of control, says chief of police", Rory Carroll, *The Guardian*, 31 May 2005
33. The Tactical Support Unit in Basra was the equivalent of the Special Police Commandos and Public Order Brigades deployed elsewhere in Iraq, ie. a high-end, specialist paramilitary counterinsurgency unit tied in closely with intelligence-based operations. See "US Collusion with Iraqi Death Squads", Max Fuller, Global Research, 26 June 2006 for a detailed description of such units at work.
34. "After seven British deaths in a week, Basra's police chief is linked to terrorists", Oliver Poole, *The Telegraph*, 15 May 2006
35. In a largely unexplained incident in March 2005, Yusif al Musawi leads a hundreds-strong demonstration against the Danish port operating company Maersk, which had illegally taken control of the important facility of Khor as Zubayr, leading to the company's eviction. Musawi is alleged to have accused the head of Maersk security of being a Jewish spy who should have been killed a long time ago ("Iraqi Port Weathers Danish Storm", Lotte Dolke Kaarsholm, Charlotte Aagaard and Osama Al-Habahbeh, CorpWatch, 31 January 2006).
36. *Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra*, Crisis Group Middle East Report No 67, 25 June 2007, p7
37. "As British troops exit Basra, Shiites vie to fill power vacuum", *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 2007
38. Whilst the International Crisis Group report (op cit.) claims that Fadhila has attempted to strengthen Basra's autonomy, perhaps on the basis of a union of three provinces, there is no doubt that the party has opposed the SCIRI-lead scheme for a nine-province federal region and a Fadhila party member, Abu Zaineab al-Edani, claims, 'We're the only party that has a national agenda,' ("Battling for Power in Basra", Institute of War and Peace Reporting, *ICR No 230*, 7 August 2007). At the same time, Knights and Williams (op cit.) record that the Fadhila governor, under pressure from his backers in the Southern Oil Company and General Union of Oil Employees, has taken a tough line with foreign oil companies and has drafted legislation intended to limit foreign involvement in the oil sector; the ICG report also highlights that Fadhila went so far as to cut off electricity to Baghdad to counter a SCIRI-backed Kurdish drive to open up the oil sector to foreign investment!
39. "US reporter murdered in Iraq had written his own epitaph", James Hider, *The Times*, 4 August 2005.
40. See "Playing with fire", Ali Rifat, Michael Smith and Richard Woods, *The Sunday Times*, 24 September 2005 for a good example of mainstream reporting of the event; see "Breaking Iraq and Blaming Iran", Andrew G Marshall, Global Research, 3 July 2008, for a useful summary of the evidence relating to the event.
41. Abdel Hadi al-Daraji, said to be Muqtada al Sadr's top official in Basra, accused Britain of plotting to start an ethnic war by carrying out bombings targeting Shia civilians and then

blaming the attacks on Sunni Arab groups (“Shia militia fies up anti-British hatred after SAS rescue”, Adrian Blomfield, *The Telegraph*, 23 September 2005).

42. According to one source, ‘when the soldiers were eventually moved to another house, the mood of their captors changed and that although their hands remained bound together they were treated quite well before being freed’ (“Captured SAS men ‘spying on drill torturer’”, Sean Rayment, *The Telegraph*, 16 October 2005).

43. *Special Report: Testimonials Regarding human rights in Basra*, Monitoring of Human Rights in Iraq, 8 April 2006. See also: “Abducted Lawyer in Iraqi Trail Slain”, 22 October 2005; Iraqi Resistance Report, 22 October 2005; the website of Juan Cole, 23 October 2005; “Prime Minister Visits al-Basrah to Assess Situation”, *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*, 25 October 2005; “Iraqi Security Forces Close in on Parties Tied to Iran”, *Al Zaman*, 29 October 2005; *Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra*, Crisis Group Middle East Report No 67, 25 June 2007, p13.

44. One of two cover explanations for the undercover British presence in Basra, as narrated by an ‘inside source’, was that a team of 24 SAS was attempting to prevent bombers entering the city from Iran (“Playing with fire”, Ali Rifat, Michael Smith and Richard Woods, *The Sunday Times*, 24 September 2005), while Blair publicly accused Iran of exporting technology and explosives to guerrillas in Basra shortly after the raid (“Iraq police are among 12 seized by British forces in Basra raid”, Rory Carroll, *The Guardian*, 8 October 2005). A second explanation for the undercover presence – that the SAS was spying on a senior police commander who had been torturing prisoners – was subsequently ‘revealed’ as the ‘real story’ by equally anonymous military sources (“Captured SAS men ‘spying on drill torturer’”, Sean Rayment, *The Telegraph*, 16 October 2005).

45. “British investigate Basra torture claims”, Brian Brady, *Scotland on Sunday*, 20 November 2005

46. “A ‘quagmire’ as violence upsets efforts to reconstitute Iraqi police forces”, Michael Moss, *The New York Times*, 24 May 2006. In an undated episode contained within the testimonials collated by Monitoring of Human Rights in Iraq that may or may not relate to this raid, after one of the so-called death cars had been traced back to Interior Affairs and its occupants arrested, the then Interior Minister Bayan Jabr ordered Governor Waeli to release the car and crew or face the cancellation of the Basra governate and its various entities! There was no outcry in support of the governor to be found in the British or international media.

47. Each of the six members of this totally corrupt ‘rogue’ unit that tortured prisoners to death with drills that was actually charged was acquitted for ‘lack of evidence’ due to witness intimidation, presumably including Britain’s Special Air Service! (*ibid.*). Maj. Peter Cripps, a British military spokesman, revealed that the members of Internal Affairs simply ‘got jobs in another department’ (“Iran-Iraq: Brits Crack Down on Basra’s Police”, *Associated Press*, 25 January 2006).

48. Two sets of arrests are recorded, the first of ‘12 Iraqis, including police officers, who were suspected of involvement in attacks against coalition forces’ on 7 October 2005 (ie. Prior to the governor’s raid against Thar Allah; “Iraq police are among 12 seized by British forces in Basra raid”, Rory Carroll, *The Guardian*, 8 October 2005), and the second of 14 people, including ‘influential members of the serious crimes and internal affairs units,



including Maj. Jassim al-Daraji, assistant director of Basra's criminal intelligence department, on 24 January 2006 ("British, Danish troops seize police in Iraqi raids" *Reuters*, 24 January 2006; "Iran-Iraq: Brits Crack Down on Basra's Police", *Associated Press*, 25 January 2006). In the first instance, we may guess that these included the six members of Internal Affairs subsequently released, while in the second we are told that nine were immediately released, while five were jailed 'for alleged roles in murder and other crimes'. According to a member of the Basra governing council, the January arrests included 12 intelligence officers, provoking fury from the governor, who intended to issue a resolution to expel the British from the city ("British Forces Arrest 12 Police Officers in Basrah", *Al-Hayat*, 25 January 2006). Bear in mind that it was the governor who actually raided Thar Allah to much consternation, while western analysts insist the Brit were cracking down on Thar Allah cells, but in actual fact appear to have been arresting police presumably loyal to the governor!

49. "Shiite factional struggles threaten Iraqi stability", *TheHill.com*

50. "Iraq Blunders 2: co-opting the militia", Adam Smith MP, 23 March 2006.

51. Fayrouz in Beaumont blog, 14 May 2006; "Forty killed in Iraq carnage", 15 May 2006.

52. "Terror links cost Basra police chief his job", *Agencies*, 14 May 2006. In Waeli's own words: 'I am astonished at the murders of the past week in Basra, where the police haven't made any kind of investigation'.

53. *Ibid.*

54. "As British troops exit Basra, Shiites vie to fill power vacuum", *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 2007. Juan Cole also refers to Thar Allah's role in leading demonstrations in his blog for 16 May 2006.

55. *The Calm Before the Storm: The British Experience in Southern Iraq*, Michael Knights and Ed Williams, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 66, February 2007, p32

56. *idid*. P30

57. *Provincial Politics in Iraq*, Michael Knights and Eamon McCarthy, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Focus 81, April 2008, p5

58. "Raid frees 17 Iraqis abducted in Baghdad", John F Burns, *The New York Times*, 23 June 2006

59. "Iranian Volunteers Set Off for Lebanon", Brian Murphy, *Associated Press*, 26 July 2006

60. Andrew G Marshall has suggested that the raid was one of the last in a series of efforts to destroy the evidence related to the activities of the two undercover British servicemen arrested in September 2005 ("Breaking Iraq and Blaming Iran", *Global Research*, 3 July 2008). It does seem perfectly likely that the Christmas assault was connected to the ongoing feud with elements of the Iraqi police that had drifted beyond British control, but it is also quite possible that the evidence that they commandeered related much more widely to the operations of the intelligence unit and its paramilitary cohorts, perhaps as part of the process of British withdrawal. An analogous event might be the break into the very secure Castelreagh complex in Northern Ireland, which housed the Special Branch, an interrogation centre and the Force Research Unit, on 17 March 2002. Just three men managed to walk out

with files, documents and computerised information relating to the British covert war in Ulster.

61. "UK troops storm Iraqi police HQ", *BBC*, 25 December 2006; "British Raid Basra Police Station", *Associated Press*, 25 December 2006.

62. Curiously, according to the chief of police of the time, 20 of the most dangerous prisoners accused of planting bombs, apparently vanished with the British raid ("Reduced to rubble ... British troops launch Christmas raid on the 'station of death'", Dominic Kennedy and Ned Parker, *The Times*, 26 December 2006).

63. "British military finds 'appalling' Iraqi prison cell", Marc Santora, *The New York Times*, 26 December 2006

64. *Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra*, Crisis Group Middle East Report No 67, 25 June 2007, p8; "Horrors that mirrored Saddam's worst excesses", Dominic Kennedy and Ned Parker, *The Times*, 26 December 2006

65. *Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra*, Crisis Group Middle East Report No 67, 25 June 2007, p16

66. "Battling for Power in Basra", *ICR No. 230*, Institute of War and Peace Reporting, 7 August 2007

67. "Militias Compete like 'Mafia Families' over Oil Rackets and Public Resources", 13 August 2007

68. "As British troops exit Basra, Shiites vie to fill power vacuum", *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 2007; "Strong Like Saddam", Kevin Peraino, *Newsweek*, 9 October 2007

69. "As British troops exit Basra, Shiites vie to fill power vacuum", *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 2007

70. *Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra*, Crisis Group Middle East Report No 67, 25 June 2007, p7

71. *ibid.* p8

72. *ibid.*

73. "As British troops exit Basra, Shiites vie to fill power vacuum", *Christian Science Monitor*, 17 September 2007

74. For an intelligent discussion, see "Breaking Iraq and Blaming Iran", Andrew G Marshall, Global Research, 3 July 2008. For ungrounded speculation that completely misunderstands the relations of US and Iraqi troops and ignores the internal politics of Basra, try "Petraeus hid Maliki's resistance to US troops", Gareth Porter, *Asia Times*, 19 April 2008. The idea that the Iraqi army could act independently reached farce when it was reported that the US was having to rely on spy satellites to keep tabs on its whereabouts (U.S. spies on Iraqi army, sources say", Greg Miller, *Los Angeles Times*, July 2, 2008).

75. As former CIA analyst Ray McGovern highlights, with so many embedded US troops

within the Iraqi army, it is simply impossible that the Knights Assault could have been undertaken without US consent (“Ex-CIA analyst on Petraeus and Cheney”, *The Real News Network*, 11 April 2008).

76. “Transcript: Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki on Iraq”, *CNN*, 7 April 2008

77. “Basra Strike Against Shiite Militias Also About Oil”, Sam Dagher, *The Christian Science Monitor*, 9 April 2008

78. “Militias finished in Iraq’s Basra: governor”, Ian Simpson, *Reuters*, 8 July 2008

79. For instance, in February Michael Wareing, who heads the Basra Development Commission, stated, ‘My sense is that many of the oil companies are very eager to come in now, and what they’re actually waiting for is the hydrocarbon law to be passed and various projects to be signed off’, (“Oil giants are poised to move into Basra”, David Smith, *The Observer*, 24 February 2008). See also “Deals With Iraq Are Set to Bring Oil Giants Back”, Andrew E. Kramer, *The New York Times*, 19 June 2008.

80. *Where is Iraq Heading? Lessons from Basra*, Crisis Group Middle East Report No 67, 25 June 2007, p7. It is also interesting to note that as a state of emergency imposed by the central government with its checkpoints and curfews ended in Basra in July 2006, Sunni families reported a wave of new leaflets warning them to flee (“In Basra, state of emergency provides little relief from violence”, Nancy A Youssef, *McClatchy Newspapers*, 4 July 2006).

81. “A ‘quagmire’ as violence upsets efforts to reconstitute Iraqi police forces”, Michael Moss, *The New York Times*, 24 May 2006

82. See *Gangs and Counter Gangs and Low Intensity Operations*

83. *The Guardian*, 14 June 2002

84. “‘For God and Ulster’: The Culture of Terror and Loyalist Death Squads in Northern Ireland”, Jeffrey A Sluka. In *Death Squad: The Anthropology of State Terror*, Jeffrey A Sluka ed., University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000

85. “Top secret army cell breaks terrorists”, Sean Rayment, *Sunday Telegraph*, 5 February 2007

86. “‘For God and Ulster’: The Culture of Terror and Loyalist Death Squads in Northern Ireland”, Jeffrey A Sluka, p135

87. “Fury as Basra troops appear in pro-UUVF magazine”, Henry McDonald, *The Observer*, September 9 2007

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