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Monday April 3 - 2006

To rebel is right, to disobey is a duty, to act is necessary



Articles

April Sunday 2nd 2006 (09h19) :

When is Killing Arab Civilians Considered a Massacre? By OMAR BARGHOUTI , Counterpunch

March 29, 2006

Atrocities By Any Other Name...

Recent reports from Iraq indicate beyond doubt that the U.S. occupation army has embarked on a new "tactic" from its menu of atrocities, in an attempt to counter the burgeoning Iraqi resistance attacks against its soldiers. "Old-style" massacres of Iraqis have become so commonplace lately that even Iraqi "allies" of the U.S. were forced to unreservedly condemn them.

Among Western governments, alas, silence prevails. After all, the massacre victims are only Arabs. Not only is there an alarming apathy towards the horrifying spread of this phenomenon, but there is also a despicable aversion to calling it by its name. At the same time, many in the West go up in arms condemning the "massacre" of seals, whales, dolphins or a few white men anywhere around the world.

"Modern" massacres, that is the indiscriminate bombing -- which last year included the use of phosphorus -- of Iraqi civilian neighborhoods in "unruly" cities like Falluja and Qa'im, have always been a standard U.S. and British tactic. But those "clean," remotely-executed and hi-tech acts of state terrorism were always easier for the world's only empire and its lackeys to defend and present as "precision" targeting of "the enemy," especially to a pathetically obedient media. The direct, messy murder of civilians, particularly by tying their hands and shooting them in the head, execution style, has not been as common, although it was practiced in several reported incidents in Iraq since the invasion. Now it is being reported more often, but in language that in effect, if not always by intention, leads to sanitizing it, even to normalizing it as a nasty, yet unavoidable, part of "war." If this evasion from using the term massacre is not deliberate, it can only reflect a deep-seated racism among western journalists who cannot use the same ethical or professional standards in reporting the killings of Arab civilians that they normally use when dealing with "white" victims in comparable situations.

Just this month, for instance, the U.S. army committed at least two massacres, killing in cold blood tens of Iraqi civilians, including four children and a six-month old baby, yet neither of them was reported as a massacre. On March 15, near Balad, the Iraqi police reported the following:

"American forces used helicopters to drop troops on the house of Faiz Harat Khalaf situated in the Abu Sifa village of the Ishaqi district. The American forces gathered the family members in one room and executed 11 people, including five children, four women and two men, then they bombed the house, burned three vehicles and killed their animals."

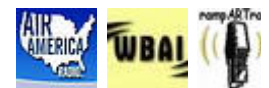
A local police commander said hospital autopsies "revealed that all the victims had bullet shots in the head and all bodies were handcuffed." It is crucial to note that the Iraqi police force is recruited, trained and assigned tasks under vigilant U.S. supervision.

A similar massacre was committed in Haditha, in November of last year, as

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When is Killing Arab Civilians Considered a Massacre? By OMAR BARGHOUTI , Counterpun

an act of revenge after a bomb attack on a U.S. marine force. A nine-year-old survivor of that crime, who lived in a house near the site of the killings, told Time magazine that after the explosion her father began reading the Qur'an. "First, they went into my father's room, where he was reading the Qur'an, and we heard shots. I couldn't see their faces very well, only their guns sticking into the doorway. I watched them shoot my grandfather first in the chest and then in the head. Then they killed my granny." All in all, 15 Iraqis were butchered in this incident.

Still, the Guardian reporter, or editor, chose not to call either "event" a massacre. He also avoided any terms of revulsion usually used to describe similar "incidents," particularly those involving white victims.

This last Sunday, March 26, another American massacre of Iraqis was reported in the Guardian. The Iraqi Security Minister, no less, described it as follows:

"At evening prayers, American soldiers accompanied by Iraqi troops raided the Mustafa mosque and killed 37 people. They [the victims] were unarmed. [US soldiers] went in, tied up the people and shot them all. They did not leave any wounded."

Calling the mosque massacre a "raid," the Guardian quoted U.S. Lieutenant Colonel Barry Johnson saying: "In our observation of the place and the activities that were going on, it's difficult for us to consider this a place of prayer," adding, "It was not identified by us as a mosque... I think this is a matter of perception." Accordingly, the U.S. army concluded that "no mosques were entered or damaged." Of course! No humans were massacred either, it would seem, as they were mere Iraqis. It is, after all, a "matter of perception."

The Independent, which is typically more courageous in covering Iraq, reported the same incident as such: "US forces killed 22 people and wounded eight at a mosque in east Baghdad." Though it did call the mosque by its name, the Independent still failed to call the "incident" a massacre. "The shooting," "the killings," but not a massacre.

To many Arabs, these massacres in Iraq evoke the memory of the Jenin refugee camp atrocities in 2002, when Israeli occupation forces bulldozed many homes and indiscriminately shot at any Palestinian who moved, leading to the death of tens and the injury of hundreds. The fact that the Palestinian armed resistance in the camp was exceptionally fierce -- and heroic, one might add, causing the death of more than 20 occupation soldiers, was used as a pretext to justify the brutal killing of innocent civilians.

A BBC report on the initial findings of an Amnesty International investigation team -- that visited the Jenin refugee camp right after the Israeli withdrawal from it -- stated:

"A British forensic expert who has gained access to the West Bank city of Jenin says evidence points to a massacre by Israeli forces. [] Prof Derrick Pounder, who is part of an Amnesty International team granted access to Jenin, said he has seen bodies lying in the streets and received eyewitness accounts of civilian deaths."

Then Israeli foreign minister, Shimon Peres, who initially told Ha'aretz that a "massacre" had taken place in Jenin, later retracting his statement, categorically stated that under no circumstances Israel should allow UN investigators access to the Camp. Indeed, Israel, supported by the U.S. and appeased by the UN General Secretary, Kofi Annan, refused to allow the UN to investigate the Israeli atrocities in Jenin. Whether the indiscriminate killings it committed in Jenin constituted a massacre or not was never allowed to be examined impartially by the UN. But what was abundantly clear by all objective accounts was the fact that Israel committed the following war crimes in Jenin:

"[T]he systematic prohibition on the provision of food, water, and medical supplies to the entire civilian population of Jenin refugee camp despite its urgent need of such supplies; systematic prohibition of medical care to the

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entire population of the camp when it was known many individuals were in urgent need of such care on account [of] injuries sustained during the conflict and/or medical conditions unrelated to it; the deliberate use of civilian non-combatants as human shields to facilitate military operations; torture, abuse, deprivation, and humiliation of men and boys arrested en masse solely on account of their status as residents of Jenin refugee camp; summary executions; implementation of a shoot-to-kill policy against individuals clearly identifiable as civilian non-combatants, on the pretext of strict enforcement of a prolonged curfew maintained without any interruption; deliberate destruction of buildings in which civilian non-combatants were known to reside without prior warning when provision of such warning would not have impeded military operations; and widespread destruction of property after the conclusion of military hostilities for punitive rather than operational objectives."

The above and the early Israeli panic lead many in the media to suspect the occurrence of a massacre. Under unprecedented Israeli intimidation, accusations and threats, however, initial western media reports of a massacre in Jenin were quickly removed from circulation. Israeli-influenced media sources later attacked those who even entertained the thought of a massacre, particularly after the total number of Palestinians killed by Israeli soldiers turned out to be "only" 56.

Whether in Iraq or Palestine, a crucial question poses itself: how many Arab civilians must be murdered in order for a massacre to be recognized as such in the patently hypocritical western media?

Omar Barghouti, independent political and cultural analyst who has published essays on the rise of empire, the Palestine question and art of the oppressed. He holds a Masters degree in electrical engineering from Columbia University, and is currently a doctoral student of philosophy (ethics) at Tel Aviv University. He contributed to the published book, *The New Intifada: Resisting Israel's Apartheid* (Verso Books, 2001). He is an advocate of the secular, democratic state solution in historic Palestine. His article "9.11 Putting the Moment on Human Terms" was chosen among the "Best of 2002" by The Guardian. He can be reached at: jenna@palnet.com

By : Harry
April Sunday 2nd 2006

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