



www.timesonline.co.uk  
**TIMES ONLINE**  
 The best of The Times and The Sunday Times, in real time



Pushing the boundaries  
 The Ashes covered from  
 every angle



Let the battle commence  
 Nintendo takes on Sony  
 in the console wars

SEARCH



SITE



WEB



Windows Live Search



GO

UK &amp; US Company Search

GO

November 26 2006

## Americas

MAKE TIMES ONLINE  
 YOUR HOMEPAGE / BOOKMARK

## WORLD

Asia  
 Iraq  
**Americas**  
 Europe  
 Middle East

## TIMES ONLINE

## NEWS &amp; COMMENT

Home UK  
 Home Global  
 UK News  
 Politics  
 World News  
 Business  
 Sport  
 Comment  
 Blogs  
 Debate  
 Tech & Net  
 Sunday Times  
 Times Online TV

## CAREER &amp; MONEY

Money  
 Jobs  
 Law  
 Education  
 Student

## LIFE &amp; STYLE

Travel  
 Women  
 Driving  
 Property & Gardens  
 Food & Drink  
 Men's Style  
 Health

## ARTS &amp; CULTURE

Entertainment  
 Books

The Times

January 10, 2005

## El Salvador-style 'death squads' to be deployed by US against Iraq militants

FROM ROLAND WATSON IN WASHINGTON

THE Pentagon is considering forming hit squads of Kurdish and Shia fighters and Shia fighters to target leaders of the Iraqi insurgency in a strategic shift borrowed from the American struggle against left-wing guerrillas in Central America 20 years ago.



John Negroponte was in Honduras when American money was used to train Contras to fight Nicaragua's Sandinista regime. (AL-RAYA/AP)

Under the so-called "El Salvador option", Iraqi and American forces would be sent to kill or kidnap insurgency leaders, even in Syria, where some are thought to shelter.

The plans are reported in this week's *Newsweek* magazine as part of Pentagon efforts to get US forces in Iraq on to the front foot against an enemy that is apparently getting the better of them.

Iyad Allawi, the interim Iraqi Prime Minister, was said to be one of the most vigorous supporters of the plan.

The Pentagon declined to comment, but one insider told *Newsweek*: "What everyone agrees is that we can't just go on as we are. We have to find a way to take the offensive against the insurgents. Right now, we are playing defence. And we are losing."

## RELATED STORIES

**January 10 2005**

America apologises for family deaths after botched bomb attack in Mosul

**January 10 2005**

Britain sends more troops for election

**June 07 2004**

Ronald Reagan

## BREAKING NEWS

**World from PA**

Bush-Iraq PM talks 'will go ahead'

Peace agreement or uprising - Hamas

Iraqi bomb factory destroyed

Trial move stokes tension in Beirut

Britons sentenced over drugs

## WORLD BRIEFING



Join the debate with **Bronwen Maddox**, Chief Foreign Commentator of The Times

## CLASSIFIEDS

TRAVEL CARS JOBS ENCOUNTERS PROPERTY 

GO

Choice of the week 

## ADVERTISEMENT

With a smart  
 search engine...

## LATEST

**Events listings**

Search for films, theatre and comedy events near you

**Screen**

For free seats at exclusive film previews

**Departure board**

Your one-stop travel shop

**Car route planner**

Find the quickest way from A to B

**Research your new car**

Browse our new and used car reviews

**Jobs**

Search hundreds of jobs and get our weekly alert

**Business analysis**

Check the latest share prices and forecasts for every listed company

**Encounters**

Search for like-minded people on our dating site

**Property search**

Cottage or castle? We have thousands of homes for sale

Listings

Crosswords

Games

TLS

Funday Times

### SPECIAL REPORTS

Changing lives

Sydney festival

Your world

Driving value

Wish I could

Carbon champions

Living the dream

Family days out

Business travel

Healthy living

La vie Francaise

Work revolution

### SOUND & VISION

TV and Video

Picture galleries

Podcasts

### SERVICES & TOOLS

Archive

News by e-mail

Newspaper edition

E-paper

My Times

Mobile

News feeds



Weather

Currency converter

Route planner

Site map

### THE MARKETPLACE

Cars

Classifieds

Dating

Jobs

Offers & Promotions

Property

Shopping

Travel

Place an advert

Audio

THE TIMES DIGEST  
LISTEN TO A FREE SAMPLE

Hit squads would be controversial and would probably be kept secret.

The experience of the so-called “death squads” in Central America remains raw for many even now and helped to sully the image of the United States in the region.

Then, the Reagan Administration funded and trained teams of nationalist forces to neutralise Salvadorean rebel leaders and sympathisers. Supporters credit the policy with calming the insurgency, although it left a bitter legacy and stirred anti-American sentiment.

John Negroponete, the US Ambassador in Baghdad, had a front-row seat at the time as Ambassador to Honduras from 1981-85.

Death squads were a brutal feature of Latin American politics of the time. In Argentina in the 1970s and Guatemala in the 1980s, soldiers wore uniform by day but used unmarked cars by night to kidnap and kill those hostile to the regime or their suspected sympathisers.

In the early 1980s President Reagan’s Administration funded and helped to train Nicaraguan contras based in Honduras with the aim of ousting Nicaragua’s Sandinista regime. The Contras were equipped using money from illegal American arms sales to Iran, a scandal that could have toppled Mr Reagan.

It was in El Salvador that the United States trained small units of local forces specifically to target rebels.

The thrust of the Pentagon proposal in Iraq, according to *Newsweek*, is to follow that model and direct US special forces teams to advise, support and train Kurdish Peshmerga fighters and Shia militiamen to target leaders of the Sunni insurgency.

It is unclear whether the main aim of the missions would be to assassinate the rebels or kidnap them and take them away for interrogation. Any mission in Syria would probably be undertaken by US Special Forces.

Nor is it clear who would take responsibility for such a programme — the Pentagon or the Central Intelligence Agency. Such covert operations have traditionally been run by the CIA at arm’s length from the administration in power, giving US officials the ability to deny knowledge of it.

The Pentagon refused to be drawn on the issue yesterday. “We don’t discuss specific future operations or specific tactics,” a spokeswoman said.

This week Gary Luck, a retired four-star general, will arrive in Iraq to review American policy in the country, looking particularly at the recruitment and training of Iraqi forces. The key to Washington’s exit strategy is the ability of Iraqi forces to take over security roles. The general has been asked by Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defence Secretary, to

### SERVICES

ARCHIVE



E-MAIL BULLETINS



FAST TIMES



CROSSWORD CLUB



FANTASY GAMES



COMPETITIONS



SHOPPING



WEATHER



GO

deliver an “ open-ended” review of how US aims can better be met.

His visit comes after two weeks of increased violence in Iraq in which scores of Iraqis and more than a dozen Americans have been killed in the run-up to the country’s elections.



**Ads by Google**

---

**[Peace education](#)**  
Peace begins with me. Maharishi University. BA-PhD.  
[MUM.edu](http://MUM.edu)

---

**[Pro-Troops/Con-this war?](#)**  
Finally, a song and site for you! Join Our Virtual Candlelight Vigil  
[www.ournoblecause.com](http://www.ournoblecause.com)

---

**[World Peace Newsletter](#)**  
Peace ideas, peace gifts, inner peace, global peace education  
[www.worldpeacenewsletter.com](http://www.worldpeacenewsletter.com)

---

**Contact our advertising team** for advertising and sponsorship in Times Online, The Times and The Sunday Times.

**Copyright 2006** Times Newspapers Ltd.

This service is provided on Times Newspapers’ **standard Terms and Conditions**. Please read our **Privacy Policy** .  
To inquire about a licence to reproduce material from The Times, visit the **Syndication website**.