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Iraq: role of cooks, clerks and drivers in military and security apparatus of Saddam Hussein's regime

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This response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to ACCORD within time constraints and in accordance with ACCORD's methodological standards and the *Common EU Guidelines for processing Country of Origin Information (COI)*.

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Please read in full all documents referred to.

Non-English language information is comprehensively summarised in English. Original language quotations are provided for reference.

Among the sources consulted by ACCORD within time constraints no specific information on the role of cooks, clerks and drivers in military and security apparatus of Saddam Hussein's regime could be found. The following sources contain information on the role of vehicles in the Anfal Campaign against the Kurds in the late 1980s and on the structure of the Iraqi security and military apparatus under the Ba'ath regime.

In the report "Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds", published by Human Rights Watch (HRW) in July 1993, trucks, busses, "IFAs", coasters and vehicles are mentioned in connection with disappearances, forced displacement and mass executions. The role of drivers is not explicitly described, only in some passages the behaviour of drivers is mentioned:

"Previously, one 12-year old boy, Taymour Abdullah Ahmad, had been the only known survivor of many accounts that Kurds -- men, women and children -- had been trucked southward to the Arab heartland of Iraq in large numbers, and then disappeared. It was assumed they had all been summarily executed, but there was no proof. During their assignment, the Middle East Watch team found and interviewed another seven survivors of mass executions recalled in convincing detail; five of them had been taken away and shot during the six-month-long military campaign, two shortly afterward." (HRW, July 1993)

"The campaigns of 1987-1989 were characterized by the following gross violations of human rights: [...] forced displacement of hundreds of thousands of villagers upon the demolition of their homes, their release from jail or return from exile; these civilians were trucked into areas of Kurdistan far from their homes and dumped there by the army with

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only minimal governmental compensation or none at all for their destroyed property, or any provision for relief, housing, clothing or food, and forbidden to return to their villages of origin on pain of death. In these conditions, many died within a year of their forced displacement; [...]" (HRW, July 1993)

"After the initial assault, ground troops and jahsh enveloped the target area from all sides, destroying all human habitation in their path, looting household possessions and farm animals and setting fire to homes, before calling in demolition crews to finish the job. As the destruction proceeded, so did Hilberg's phase of the "concentration" or "seizure" of the target group. Convoys of army trucks stood by to transport the villagers to nearby holding centers and transit camps, while the jahsh combed the hillsides to track down anyone who had escaped." (HRW, July 1993)

"But Anfal was different. The troops arrived at breakfast time, set fire to the houses, killed all the farm animals and rounded up many of the villagers. Others managed to flee into the hills, where they remained for several days. But they realized that they were encircled on three sides, and had no alternative but to head south toward the highway, where they surrendered to a jahsh unit commanded by a mustashar named Adnan Jabari. It was the first day of Ramadan, the Muslim month of fasting, one elderly man remembered--April 17. Trucks were waiting to take them away, and many of them were never seen again. The surviving villagers later made a list of 102 people from Warani who had disappeared.¹³ As with all the villages in the Daoudi tribal area, those who vanished included large numbers of women and children." (HRW, July 1993)

"The people of nearby Qeitoul, by contrast, had taken to the hills a full two weeks before Anfal reached them, as soon as they heard news of the fall of the Sergalou-Bergalou PUK headquarters on March 19. There were no peshmerga in the vicinity at the time, and they felt unprotected. From their hiding places above the village, they saw the soldiers entering Qeitoul, preceded by jahsh units and with helicopters providing air support. After a brief debate they decided to make for the town of Chamchamal, several hours walk to the north. But they were captured in the mountains by troops under the command of Brig. Gen. Bareq. The army registered their names and sent them off in two groups of trucks. One headed east toward Suleimaniyeh; the other west, in the direction of Kirkuk. Many never returned.

Other villagers nearby were caught unawares in their homes by the army's lightning attack. This happened, for instance, in Qirtsa, a remote village of one hundred houses on a dirt road beyond Qeitoul. Qirtsa was a peaceful place--"We were living naturally, no peshmerga, no government," remembered one resident--and the attack, early in the morning, found the villagers still in bed. Only a handful managed to reach the safety of the mountains. Gen. Bareq himself was in personal command of the troops that came in that morning, rounding up all the village men on the spot and handcuffing their hands behind their backs. The men were trucked away first. Then another army IFA departed, this one loaded up with the villagers' livestock. Finally the women, children and elderly were driven off, but only after the soldiers had looted their homes. As they waited for the IFAs and coasters that would take them away, the women watched the village set afire

and then leveled with bulldozers. Sixty people disappeared from Qirtsa, including every male under the age of forty and many of the women. Another sixty vanished from neighboring Qeitoul. "I am not sorry for myself but for the young women," a female survivor of Qirtsa told Middle East Watch. "We do not know what happened to them. They were so beautiful. If they were guilty, of what? Why? What had they done wrong?" They had done nothing wrong, of course. They were simply Kurds living in the wrong place at the wrong time. But their fate may shed important light on one of the great enigmas of the Anfal campaign. Throughout Iraqi Kurdistan, adult males who were captured were disappeared en masse--as the standing orders of June 1987 demanded. In certain clearly defined areas, however, the women and children vanished as well. In some cases, such as the Gulbagh Valley, these mass disappearances occurred in areas where the troops had encountered significant peshmerga resistance."

"Other men were roughly transported to Chamchamal in open-backed army IFA trucks. "We suffered much at the hands of the guards," said one. "We were blindfolded and had our hands tied, and we were made to get on and off the trucks several times. The trucks had a door and one step, but because we could not see or use our hands, many fell. It was chaotic." "At the brigade headquarters," another man added, "we were literally thrown out of the trucks, and they took our names and addresses." After the stop at the army brigade headquarters, it became apparent that other government authorities were becoming involved for the first time. Winding through the streets of Chamchamal, the prisoners soon found themselves outside the offices of Amn, the feared secret police agency.

At this point, an almost unprecedented act of mercy and solidarity occurred. Anfal witnessed many quiet acts of individual courage, both by members of the jahsh and by Kurdish townspeople, and these saved many lives. But nothing quite compares to the response of the townspeople of Chamchamal as they saw their fellow Kurds being trucked through their streets. At enormous risk to their own lives--and in some cases at the cost of their lives--the townspeople staged a spontaneous unarmed revolt to liberate the detainees.

The jahsh undoubtedly had a hand in the Chamchamal protest, and chance also played its part. The trucks that were being used to ferry the prisoners from the Chamchamal brigade headquarters were not military IFAs but commandeered civilian vehicles, with civilian drivers. Surreptitiously, the jahsh guards persuaded a number of these drivers to free their women prisoners. The drivers seized their opportunity to do so in the uproar that ensued when townspeople stoned the trucks and smashed their windows. "Even young children put stones in their dresses, threatening to break the windows," said Perjin, a 20-year old woman from Qirtsa village, who was able to break free. The soldiers opened fire on the demonstrators, and even called in MIG fighter planes and helicopter gunships to rocket the crowd. "My dress was full of bullets from the Bareq soldiers," Perjin said. According to one account, five people died and twelve were injured." (HRW, July 1993)

"The drivers and Special Forces guards climbed down from the vehicles at this point. Their replacements were dressed all in green with black berets--a uniform that is characteristic of both Amn and the Ba'ath Party, as well as the regular Iraqi police. The officer and several other men jumped into two Toyota Landcruisers. There were also two bulldozers. With the bulldozers in the lead, the new nine-vehicle caravan drove west along a bumpy paved road that ran parallel to the Euphrates. In the fading light, the silhouettes of date palms fringed the road to the right. One of the prisoners in Ozer's bus was weak and faint, and a prisoner who spoke a little Arabic begged the new driver for water. This was not allowed, the driver answered. "Let the man die," he said. "You are all men of Jalal Talabani." (HRW, July 1993)

"In the sudden quiet, the prisoners could hear the steady chatter of gunfire from automatic weapons, and the churning, whining sound of bulldozer engines. After perhaps twenty minutes, the guns fell silent. Out of the darkness, a bulldozer lumbered toward them and took up position behind the bus. Gears screaming, it tried several times to push the vehicle out of the sand, but the front wheels only dug in deeper. Next it tried to lift the bus out by its rear end, and Ozer thought the driver meant to tip them headlong into a trench, bus and all. At last, the bulldozer managed to drag the stalled vehicle out frontwards. The driver climbed down from his cab, exhausted by the effort, and took out his hip flask. The prisoners begged for water, banging on the windowless steel walls. The driver drank deeply and jeeringly held up his flask as the rest of the liquid trickled away into the sand." (HRW, July 1993)

"The remaining Omer Qala villagers fled once more, walking until they reached the town of La'likhan on the main road. They found a huge crowd of people from many different villages milling around, and a large fleet of trucks which the army had brought to collect them. Again the villagers conferred. Despite their terror, they again agreed that surrender was their only hope. Akram, an eighteen-year old from Omer Qala, was still suspicious, however. Fearing punishment as a draft dodger, he hid himself in an empty barrel to observe the mass surrender. Five hundred gave themselves up; only twenty, including Akram, stayed behind. Akram survived; the five hundred disappeared." (HRW, July 1993)

"The civilian governor of Erbil said that he, too, was powerless. Despite Mahmoud's deferential gift of a number of sheep, the Kurdish governor of Suleimaniyeh, Sheikh Ja'far Barzinji, told much the same story: many prisoners, both men and women, were being held in Ar'ar in a facility that was serviced by Egyptian truck drivers in the interests of secrecy. Personally, he could do no more than Mahmoud. The affair rested in the hands of the president and his cousin. But in Kirkuk, the information department of the Ba'ath Party's Northern Bureau told Mahmoud that Majid "had no time to meet me." In despair, he went back to Suleimaniyeh, where he approached a certain powerful Kurd who was known to be close to al-Majid and frequently entertained him in his home. The man agreed to intercede personally. "But Majid swore by the Holy Koran that only Saddam Hussein and God could save the disappeared." Exhausted and dispirited, Mahmoud abandoned his search." (HRW, July 1993)

"These early morning movements of male prisoners were observed by women and older people in other sections of Topzawa. "We saw them taking off the men's shirts and beating them," said one elderly man. "They were handcuffed to each other in pairs, and they took away their shoes. This was going on from 8:00 a.m. until noon."¹⁵ Sometimes the men were blindfolded as well; according to some accounts they were stripped to their shorts. And at last they were packed into sinister-looking vehicles, painted white or green and windowless; these were variously described as resembling buses, ambulances or closed trucks. This was the last that was seen of the men who had been held at Topzawa. As the windowless vehicles left in one direction, buses drove off in another, filled with the other detainees. For many of the women and children--but by no means all of them, as we shall see--the next destination was the prison of Dibs. For the elderly, the road led south, through the river valleys of central Iraq, before turning southwest, into the desert. "The Kurds are traitors, and we know where to send you," a military officer told one old man from Najaf. "We will send you to a hell that is built especially for the Kurds."¹⁶ Its name was Nugra Salman." (HRW, July 1993)

In his book *Republic of Fear*, Kanan Makiya describes the structure of the Iraqi security and military apparatus under the Ba'ath regime. He mentions that members of the Ba'ath party militia came from all walks of life and that millions of people have passed through the militia system:

"The militia system never evolved into the army. But it was overhauled in 1974 following the Kzar affair (when some units showed confused loyalties) along with the whole policing system. The reorganized "popular militia" or "people's army" fell under the authority of the Mukhabarat. By the late 1970s, with the army no longer a political force, the militia began to take on a new character. The units became viewed as auxiliary to the army, and as vehicles for party recruitment and the promotion of Ba'athi values among youth. Membership, once confined to men of the party over eighteen years of age, was expanded to non Ba'athists in 1975 and to women in 1976. Militia members undergo a two-month annual training period and come from all walks of life (factory workers, civil servants, students). Employers are reimbursed by the government for the absences of employees, and students are excused from their studies. Many members have been involved in the Lebanese civil war. Training takes place in the militia's own schools by graduates of those schools. It includes lectures on political vigilance and Ba'athist ideology as well as weapon and tactical training. From a few thousand in the early 1970s, the popular militia mushroomed with the war to 450,000 people (in 1982). Today the militia system is an experience that millions of people have passed through." (Makiya, 1998, p. 31-32)

Makiya tries to estimate how many people in Iraq were institutionally charged with the infliction of violence. His conclusion is that one fifth of the economically active Iraqi labour force were institutionally charged during peacetime (1980) with one form or another of violence:

"By armed men, I mean those people (overwhelmingly men) institutionally charged with the infliction of violence. Clearly they don't have to be carrying guns all the time. The criterion is satisfied by the fact that they draw a wage from the state for the purpose of

“defending” the homeland, policing citizens, controlling movement, surveillance, catching offenders, and anything else the Ba’th might fit into the label of “national security.” How many people can be included in 1980?” (Makiya, 1998, p. 32)

“The overall picture in 1980, a peak year in the fortunes of Ba’thism, is shown in Table 2. One-fifth of the economically active Iraqi labour force (about 3.4 million people) were institutionally charged during peacetime (1980) with one form or another of violence. This is an extraordinary relationship, completely out of proportion with any other country that I can think of. Beyond a certain point, such numbers begin to account for every important specificity of the polity. Opposition can no longer arise except in people’s minds, and then it is not really an opposition at all. In addition, the criteria used to justify this “security” are themselves continuously redefined (and have to be for the system to be self-perpetuating). A political opposition that does not exist in reality has to be invented because of the way in which the polity is constructed. Once such numbers come into play, very few things about society matter any longer (such as its class structure, confessional allegiances, the preoccupations of its intelligentsia, income disparities, and other social or political injustices).” (Makiya, 1998, p. 38-39)

References (all links accessed 29 October 2009):

- HRW - Human Rights Watch: Genocide in Iraq: The Anfal Campaign Against the Kurds, July 1993
<http://www.hrw.org/legacy/reports/1993/iraqanfal/ANFAL13.htm>
also available at Refworld: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/47fdfb1d0.html>
- Makiya, Kanan: Republic of Fear. The Politics of Modern Iraq. Updated edition, 1998