

A NATION AT WAR: Guerrilla Warfare, and Jihad Volunteers

THE ISLAMIC WORLD

For Arabs Driven by Pride and Religion, the New Jihad Is in Iraq

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tacked, and heaven the sure reward for death.

Almost daily, one senior figure or another boasts that 1,000 more Arab volunteers have arrived in Iraq. Vice President Taha Yassin Ramadan said at a news conference today that the count now stood at 6,000, with half of them willing to be suicide bombers or, as he put it, "ticking bombs."

"This is what we ask of the Arab populations," he said.

It is difficult to ascertain from the volunteers which ones might seek such a role. If the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is any guide, those who boast about it rarely prove to be the ones who blow themselves up.

One man, noticing a reporter in the midst of a group of volunteers, mimed strapping explosives around his waist. "We are not afraid," he said, adding "Boom!" and then pointing heavenward.

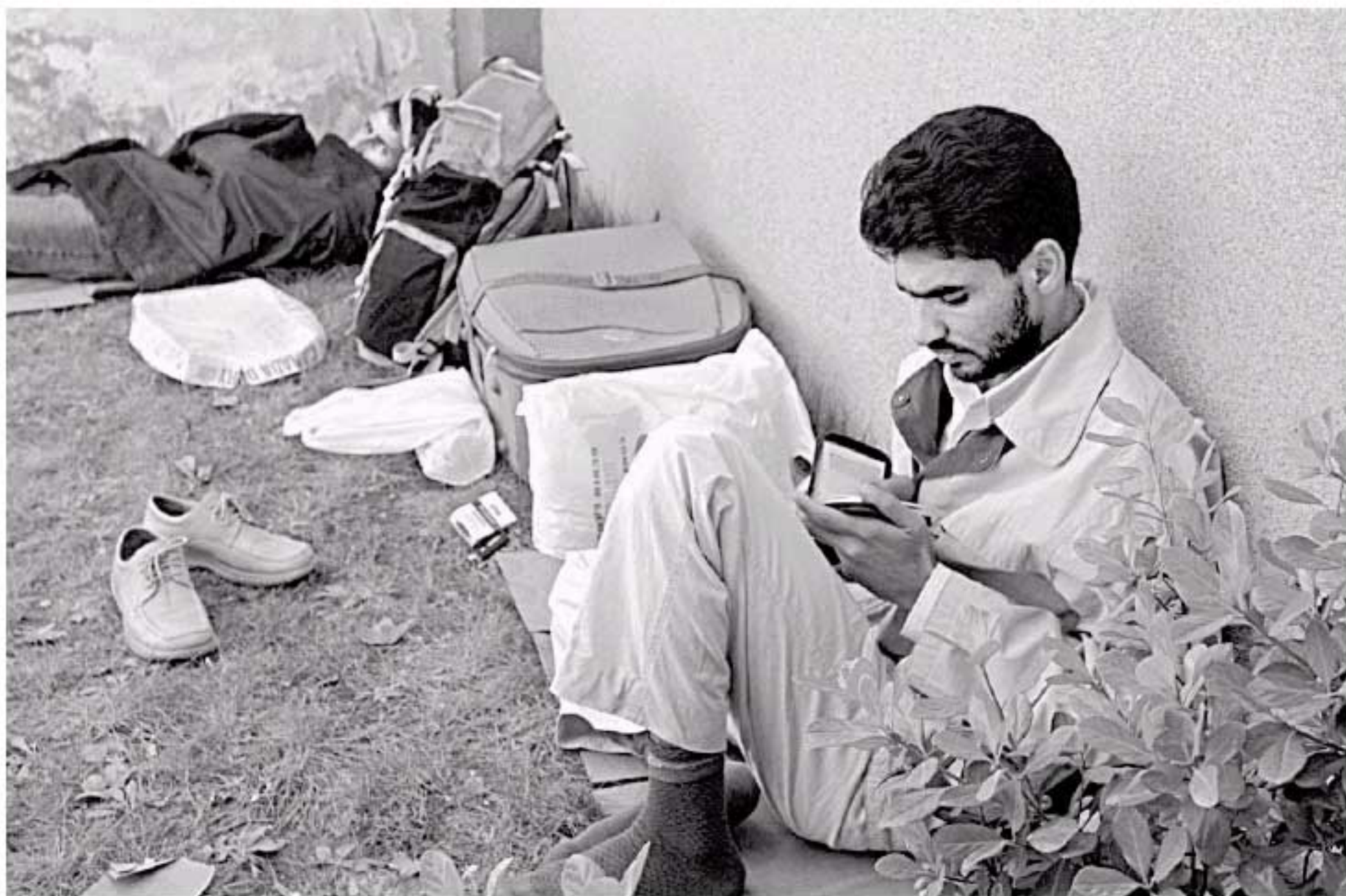
But some clearly are not interested. A 28-year-old Syrian man who designs Web sites said the sight of children dying and Baghdad burning moved him to volunteer. He said he wanted to help the wounded, but would fight if the Iraqis demanded it.

Officially the Syrian government discourages anyone from going, considering untrained volunteers an added burden on the Iraqi government. Farouk Sharaa, the foreign minister, while flaying the United States this week for waging the war, also told the Syrian Parliament that volunteers should be dissuaded. Some Syrian men said the staff at the Iraqi Consulate, which in a twist of real estate sits across the street from the American Embassy, told them they could not go.

But Syria has long maintained one of the most liberal entry policies in the Middle East — anyone holding a passport from any Arab country can enter or leave with few questions asked. "If anybody is going, it is beyond our control as the government," said Buthaina Shaaban, the spokeswoman for the Foreign Ministry. "We have long borders with Iraq and we can't put a policeman on every single meter."

She said that given the level of Arab anger stemming from civilian bloodshed, especially after years of similar scenes involving Palestinian civilians, it was surprising that Syria was not overrun with millions of volunteers.

One factor limiting the number is that other Arab governments are preventing young men from leaving. An Egyptian official said the security police at all borders had been instructed to turn back any young men heading for Syria if they failed



Ibrahim Muhammad, a Libyan volunteer answering the call to jihad, reads the Koran as he waits in Damascus for a bus to take him to fight in Iraq.

to provide proof of a decent job or other plausible reason for going. Jordanian volunteers said that anyone who admitted wanting to go to Iraq to fight was turned back.

"The borders were closed to them and their passports voided because the government thought that we would turn into other bin Ladens," said Muhammad Ahmed, a 23-year-old volunteer from a Palestinian refugee camp in Jordan.

Rulings from religious institutions on the issue of jihad have been mixed. Al Azhar, the most venerable seat of Islamic learning, issued an edict in Cairo calling for jihad, although a later clarification stressed that it meant jihad in the sense of a nonviolent struggle.

Syria's top Muslim religious authority, Sheik Ahmad Kaftaro, last week encouraged suicide bombings in Iraq. "I call on Muslims everywhere to use all means possible to thwart the aggression, including martyr operations against the belligerent American, British and Zionist

invaders," he said in a statement.

In Saudi Arabia, the state-controlled religious establishment that appears on television has discouraged the faithful from heading to Iraq. But on the free range of the Internet, militant Muslim scholars urge them to join up.

Some volunteers brush aside the issue of Iraq entirely, speaking only about the importance of jihad to defend any Islamic land whether their religious elders support it or not. One Saudi volunteer in Damascus dredged up the obscure example of an early follower of Muhammad who heard the call for jihad through his window while lying with his wife and abandoned her to pursue the fight.

Until recently, the Iraqi government was doggedly secular, reviled by Muslim fundamentalists for its executions of religious scholars who defied from Mr. Hussein's rule.

Now some volunteers laud Mr. Hussein. "He's not a dictator," said one young Jordanian. "Among all the Arab leaders he is the only one who

has stood up to the United States."

Not all volunteers are Arabs. One Canadian Muslim showed up at the buses brandishing a sword inscribed "God is Great!" and there are a smattering of Europeans among the Arabs who have come from as far as Morocco. A few are over 40, having left wives and children at home.

Many draw comparisons to other fights. Palestinians outside the occupied territories are particularly moved to go to Iraq because they have been frustrated for so long at their inability to cross into the West Bank or Gaza.

Many volunteers said they were going because they were especially outraged that the United States said it was bringing democracy while actually killing civilians daily.

"America says it wants to protect the Iraqis while actually attacking them," said Naji, a 23-year-old Jordanian who dropped out of college to go just weeks before graduation. "Where are these so-called smart weapons they are talking about?"

Most volunteers are not sure exactly how they will get to Baghdad or what they will do once they get there. On some nights the battered buses provided by the Iraqi Embassy materialize outside its evidently defunct trade pavilion here. "To Baghdad, the citadel of lions," read a hand-lettered sign in the front window of one bus this week. Other nights, the buses don't appear.

One reason Syria has been discouraging anyone from leaving is that the road to Baghdad is considered too dangerous. Relatives said one of the first volunteers known to have died — a Palestinian who had emigrated to Denmark and who was buried in Lebanon today — was killed last week when an American helicopter attacked his bus.

But the volunteers who hear of such dangers say they will not be deterred.

"I will stay there until the last infidel leaves the land of Iraq," said Mr. Abu Shinaf, the Libyan volunteer.

THE CASUALTIES

U.S. Military Has No Count Of Iraqi Dead In Fighting

By JOHN M. BRODER

CAMP SAYLIYA, Qatar, April 1 — The world knows with some precision how many American and British soldiers have been killed so far in the war in Iraq: 73 as of late today. The names of the dead and the cause of their deaths are scrupulously reported by Washington and London, with some delay to notify their families.

But how many Iraqi soldiers have died?

It could be scores, hundreds, even thousands. No one outside Iraq — and probably no one there, either — knows. As in the Persian Gulf war in 1991 and in Afghanistan, the American military is not counting.

American officials say numbering the enemy dead in the midst of battle is dangerous and ultimately fruitless. They say it is not a statistic that interests them. They speak in lifeless terms of "degrading" or "attesting" enemy military formations, so they can assess the strength of the force opposing them. They count destroyed tanks and artillery pieces and missile launchers. They count captured weapons. They do not count people, civilian or military.

"You know, we don't do body counts," Gen. Tommy R. Franks said a year ago in response to reports that American bombing killed 1,000 Al Qaeda and Taliban fighters in the Afghanistan campaign of 2001-02.

Even if allied commanders were curious about the number of enemy dead, the Iraq conflict presents a host of challenges. The Iraqi fighting force takes numerous forms — regular Republican Guard units in uniform, fedayeen paramilitary forces, Al Quds volunteer brigades and a variety of irregular fighters who carry weapons but do not wear uniforms. Coalition forces also consider members of the Baath Party to be enemy combatants, even if they have not taken up arms.

American and British forces can sometimes estimate the number of enemy casualties in close encounters, like a battle today near Diwaniya, where a Marine officer reported that his unit had killed 90 Iraqi troops. British troops said last week that they had bombed a Baath Party gathering in Basra, killing an estimated 200 people.

But how many Iraqi soldiers have been killed by the relentless bombing campaign waged against Republican Guard units along the approaches to Baghdad?

Every day, briefers at Central