

2003-2013: Iraqi Resistance, American Dirty War, And The Remaking Of The Middle East – PART 3

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➤ Dirty war as a key strategy to subdue the Iraqi people¹

"Insurgents in Iraq are right to try to force US troops out of the country", Commander Gen Sir Michael Rose told the BBC's Newsnight programme. He also said that the US and the UK must "admit defeat" and stop fighting "a hopeless war" in Iraq. Iraqi insurgents would not give in, he said. "I don't excuse them for some of the terrible things they do, but I do understand why they are resisting."² On 9 January 2006, Rose called for Tony Blair to be impeached over the 2003 Invasion of Iraq, saying: "To go to war on what turns out to be false grounds is something that no one should be allowed to walk away from."

The US and UK armies, faced with a fierce resistance but unwilling to admit defeat, drastically changed their tactics, as described by Seymour Hersh in the New Yorker on 15 December 2003: "*An American adviser said: 'The only way we can win is to go unconventional. We're going to have to play their game. Guerrilla versus guerrilla. Terrorism versus terrorism. We've got to scare the Iraqis into submission.' (...)'The proposed operation - called 'preemptive manhunting' by one Pentagon adviser - has the potential to turn into another (Vietnam) Phoenix Program' (...) We do need a more unconventional response, but it's going to be messy.*"³

Messy.... Indeed. And not reported in the Western mainstream press. The USA/UK organized "*preemptive manhunting*" and used Israel, Iranian and Iraqi proxy forces to brutalize, imprison, torture and kill millions of Iraqis. Millions more were expelled from their homes, internally displaced and driven into exile.

On 6 November 2003, The New York Times headlined: *US decides to back Iraqi militia force*: "The US administrator of Iraq, Paul Bremer, has given conditional support to the creation of an Iraqi-led paramilitary force to track down resistance

fighters who have eluded US troops.” “It would be made up of former members of the security services and political party militias.”⁴

On January 1st 2004, Robert Dreyfuss reported that the US government planned to create paramilitary units comprised of militiamen from Iraqi Kurdish and exile groups including the Badr brigades, the Iraqi National Congress and the Iraqi National Accord to wage a campaign of terror and extra-judicial killing, similar to the Phoenix program in Vietnam: the terror and assassination campaign that killed tens of thousands of civilians.

“part of a secret \$3 billion in new funds—tucked away in the \$87 billion Iraq appropriation that Congress approved in early November 2003—will go toward the creation of a paramilitary unit manned by militiamen associated with former Iraqi exile groups. Experts say it could lead to a wave of extrajudicial killings, not only of armed rebels but of nationalists, other opponents of the U.S. occupation and thousands of civilian Baathists—up to 120,000 of the estimated 2.5 million former Baath Party members in Iraq. (...) The hidden \$3 billion will fund covert (“black”) operations disguised as an Air Force classified program. According to John Pike, an expert on classified military budgets at www.globalsecurity.org, the cash, spread over three years, is likely being funnelled directly to the CIA, boosting that agency’s estimated \$4 billion a year budget by fully 25 percent. Operations in Iraq will get the bulk of it, with some money going to Afghanistan. The number of CIA officers in Iraq, now 275, will increase significantly, supplemented by large numbers of the U.S. military’s elite counterinsurgency forces”. “It’s time for ‘no more Mr. Nice Guy,’” a neoconservative strategist said. “All those people shouting, ‘Down with America!’ and dancing in the street when Americans are attacked? We have to kill them.”⁵ Over that period, reports of death squads and ethnic cleansing emerged, described in the press as “sectarian violence”, the new central narrative of the war and the principal justification for continued occupation. Some of the violence may have been spontaneous, but there is overwhelming evidence that most of it was the result of the plans described by several American experts in December 2003.

An Altnet article of 16 June 2004, titled “Here come the Death Squad Veterans” stated: “Blackwater USA has sent recruiters to Chile, Peru, Argentina, Colombia and

Guatemala for one specific reason alone," said an intelligence officer in Kuwait who requested anonymity. "All these countries experienced dirty wars and they have military men well-trained in dealing with internal subversives. They are well-versed in extracting confessions from prisoners." As the security situation in Iraq deteriorated in the spring of 2004, more "dedicated recruiting" began.⁶

In June 2004, Gen. David H. Petraeus took the assignment of organizing training for all Iraqi military and police forces following their collapse during the Shiite and Sunni uprisings two months earlier. During this period he was instrumental in forming government-sponsored militias throughout Iraq that operate as anti-Sunni death squads, and which have plunged the nation into civil war. In the fall of 2004, Petraeus was arming, equipping and funding the Special Police Commandos, calling them "a horse to back."⁷

The Salvador Option

The first reference to the "Salvador Option" and comparison with the death squad atrocities in Middle and Latin America in the 1980's was made by Ghali Hassan on 12 October 2004 in his article: "Iraq's Democracy: The El Salvador Model": "The core of the current US-appointed Iraqi Interim Government (IIG) are: The Allawi's group of exiles (INA), the Ahmed Chalabi's group of exiles (INC), the Peshmergas of the two Kurdish parties, and the Badr Brigade (Supreme Council for Islamic Revolution in Iraq, SCIRI – *currently the DAWA party*), mostly of Iranian origin. Furthermore, each group has its own mafia-style death squad, and links to the CIA or the Israeli Mossad agents. Since they entered Iraq with the US invasion, the four groups have taken the law into their own hands and have killed many innocent Iraqis, including hundreds of Iraqi scientists and community leaders. The Occupation authority has never investigated their crimes. They entered Iraq on the backs of US tanks. Their relations with the Occupation are fully symbiotic relations. They co-exist in a mutually beneficial relationship with their US master. They are participating in the upcoming elections, because they want the Occupation to continue."⁸

In January 2005, more than a year after the first reports about the Pentagon's planning for assassinations and paramilitary operations, Newsweek and other major

media mentioned the “Salvador Option”: the outsourcing of state terrorism to local proxy forces. This was regarded as a key component of a policy that had succeeded in preventing the total defeat of the US-backed government in El Salvador. According to Newsweek, "one Pentagon proposal would send Special Forces teams to advise, support, and possibly train Iraqi squads . . . to target Sunni insurgents and their sympathizers (...)" "The Sunni population is paying no price for the support it is giving to the terrorists. From their point of view, it is cost-free. We have to change that equation."⁹ From 1984 to 1986 Col. James Steele had led the US Military Advisory Group in El Salvador, where he was responsible for developing special operating forces at brigade level during the height of the conflict. These forces, composed of the most brutal soldiers available, replicated the kind of small-unit operations with which Steele was familiar from his service in Vietnam. Rather than focusing on seizing terrain, their role was to attack ‘insurgent’ leadership, their supporters, sources of supply and base camps. In the case of the 4th Brigade, such tactics ensured that a 20-man force was able to account for 60% of the total casualties inflicted by the unit¹⁰. In addition to his experience in El Salvador, Steele had been in charge of retraining Panama's security forces following the ousting of President Manuel Noriega¹¹.

The American forces recruited the most criminal layers of the Iraqi population. Pentagon-hired mercenaries, like Dyncorp, helped form the sectarian militias that were used to terrorize and kill Iraqis and to provoke Iraq into civil war.

It reveals the fundamental nature of “dirty war”, like in Latin America and the worst excesses of the Vietnam War. The purpose of dirty war is not to identify and then detain or kill actual resistance fighters. The target of dirty war is the civilian population. It is a strategy of state terrorism and collective punishment against an entire population with the objective to terrorizing it into submission. It is a strategy to cut off the people’s links with the resistance and break the popular support for the guerrilla. The same tactics used in Central America and Colombia were exported to Iraq. Even the architects of these dirty wars in El Salvador (Ambassador John Negroponte and James Steele) and in Colombia (Steven Casteel) were transferred to Iraq to do the same dirty work. They recruited, trained and deployed the notorious “Special Police Commandos”, in which later, in 2006, death squads like the Badr

Brigades and other militias were incorporated. US forces set up a high-tech operations centre for the Special Police Commandos at an “undisclosed location” in Iraq. American technicians installed satellite telephones and computers with uplinks to the Internet and US forces Networks. The command centre had direct connections to the Iraqi Interior Ministry and to every US forward operating base in the country.¹²

As the atrocities by these forces in Iraq made the news in 2005, Casteel would play a critical role in blaming extrajudicial killings on “insurgents” with stolen police uniforms, vehicles and weapons. He and General Petraeus also claimed that torture centres were run by rogue elements of the Interior Ministry, even as accounts came to light of torture taking place inside the ministry headquarters where he and other Americans worked. US advisers to the Interior Ministry had their offices on the 8th floor, directly above a jail on the 7th floor where torture was taking place.¹³

The uncritical attitude of the Western media to American officials’ narratives prevented worldwide protests over the massive escalation of the counterinsurgency war in Iraq in 2005 and 2006, consistent with a disguised, quiet, media-free approach, typical for counterinsurgency operations. General Downing, the former head of US Special Forces, said on NBC in January 2005: “This is under control of the US forces, of the current Interim Iraqi government. There’s no need to think that we’re going to have any kind of killing campaign that’s going to maim innocent civilians.”¹⁴ Within months, Iraq was swept by exactly such a killing campaign, which has led to arbitrary detention, torture, extra-judicial executions and the mass exodus and internal displacement of millions. Thousands of Iraqis disappeared during the worst days of this dirty war between 2005 and 2007. Many were seen picked up by uniformed militias¹⁵ and piled into lorries, others simply seemed to vanish. Interior Ministry death squads moved unhindered through American as well as Iraqi checkpoints as they detained, tortured and killed thousands of people. The Iraqi government issued instructions to all security and health offices not to give out body count numbers to the media. Dozens of bodies were found every day across Baghdad. “We are not authorized to issue any numbers, but I can tell you that we are still receiving human bodies every day; the men have no identity on them,” a doctor at the Baghdad morgue told IPS on 19February 2008.¹⁶ Between 50 and 180 bodies

were dumped on Baghdad's streets each day at the height of the killing, and many bore signs of torture, such as drill holes or cigarette burns.¹⁷

On 30 April 2006 the *BRussells* Tribunal reported that "After exact counting and documenting, the Iraqi Organisation for Follow-up and Monitoring has confirmed that 92 % of the 3498 bodies found in different regions of Iraq have been arrested by officials of the Ministry of Interior. Nothing was known about the arrestees' fate until their riddled bodies were found with marks of horrible torture. It's regrettable and shameful that these crimes are being suppressed and that several states receive government officials, who fail to investigate these crimes."¹⁸

The consequence of not mentioning the connection between the US and the Iranian-backed Badr Brigade militia, the US-backed Wolf Brigade and other Special Police Commando units, or the extent of American recruitment, training, command, and control of these units¹⁹ distorted perceptions of events in Iraq, creating the impression of senseless violence initiated by the Iraqis themselves and concealing the American hand in the planning and execution of the most savage forms of violence. News editors played a significant role in avoiding the public outrage that might have discouraged the further escalation of this campaign if they had investigated the precise extent of US complicity in different aspects and phases of death squad operations, torture and disappearances.²⁰ The prime responsibility for this policy, and for the crimes it involved, rests with the individuals in the civilian and military command structure of the US Department of Defense, the CIA and the White House who devised, approved and implemented the "Phoenix" or "Salvador" terror policy in Iraq.

The report of the Human Rights Office of UNAMI, issued on September 8th 2005, written by John Pace was very explicit, linking the campaign of detentions, torture and extra-judicial executions directly to the Interior Ministry and indirectly to the US-led Multi-National Forces.²¹ John Pace, who left Baghdad in January 2006, told *The Independent* on Sunday that up to three-quarters of the corpses stacked in the city's mortuary show evidence of gunshot wounds to the head or injuries caused by drill-bits or burning cigarettes. Much of the killing, he said, was carried out by Shia Muslim groups under the control of the Ministry of the Interior.²²

The final UN Human Rights Report of 2006²³ described the consequences of these policies for the people of Baghdad, but failed to mention their roots in American policy. The “sectarian violence” that engulfed Iraq in 2006 and 2007 was not an unintended consequence of the US invasion and occupation but an integral part of it. The US deliberately undermined stability and security in Iraq in a desperate effort to “divide and rule” the country and to fabricate new justifications for unlimited violence against Iraqis who continued to reject the illegal invasion and occupation of their country.

What is the answer of the OHCHR (Office of the High Commissioner of Human Rights) to the Iraqi killing fields? Did they appoint a Special Rapporteur on Human Rights for Iraq? No they didn't. They shut their eyes and stepped into the fantasy story of a “blossoming democracy” in Iraq, repeating the fictitious US tales about overall improvements for the Iraqi people. What can be more hypocrite and cynical than this quote on the main webpage of OHCHR in Iraq: *“From 2006 to 2009, UNAMI Human Rights Office carried out a number of training courses for the staff of the Ministry of Human Rights, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Defense on the relevant human rights standards and the international humanitarian law (IHL), and sponsored several high-level seminars on the protection of human rights within the framework of Iraq’s counter-terrorism measures. UNAMI Human Rights Office and OHCHR was also actively engaged on the development of capacity of the Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry of Justice by sponsoring workshops and training courses for their staff in Baghdad and governorates on detention standards and human rights monitoring, and it assisted and continues to assist with the establishment of the Iraq’s High Commission of Human Rights, a Center for Missing and Disappeared Persons and a national Center for the Rehabilitation of the Victims of Torture.”*²⁴ The World Community has clearly abandoned the Iraqi people. Human Rights don't apply to them.

Even the International Criminal Court has abandoned the Iraqi people. “The Office of the Prosecutor has received over 240 communications concerning the situation in Iraq.(...) The available information provided no reasonable indicia that Coalition forces had “intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious

group as such”, as required in the definition of genocide (Article 6). Similarly, the available information provided no reasonable indicia of the required elements for a crime against humanity, i.e. a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population. (...)The available information did not indicate intentional attacks on a civilian population. (...) After analyzing all the available information, it was concluded that there was a reasonable basis to believe that crimes within the jurisdiction of the Court had been committed, namely wilful killing and inhuman treatment. (...) The information available at this time supports a reasonable basis for an estimated 4 to 12 victims of wilful killing and a limited number of victims of inhuman treatment, totalling in all less than 20 persons. Even where there is a reasonable basis to believe that a crime has been committed, this is not sufficient for the initiation of an investigation by the International Criminal Court.”, was Special Prosecutor Moreno Ocampo’s answer on 9 February 2006.²⁵

The nature and extent of involvement of different individuals and groups within the US occupation structure in death squad operations has remained a dirty, dark secret, but there are many leads that could be followed by any serious inquiry, especially by the appropriate Special Rapporteurs of the OHCHR. Fact: each Iraqi unit of the National Police generally had at least two U.S. officers attached to it, usually from U.S. Special Forces units.²⁶ In November 2005, the U.S. advisers attached to the Wolf Brigade were from the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, known as the "Nightstalkers".²⁷

In January 2007, the US government announced a new strategy, the “surge” of US combat troops in Baghdad and Al-Anbar province. Most Iraqis reported that this escalation of violence made living conditions even worse than before, as its effects were added to the accumulated devastation of 4 years of war and occupation.

The escalation of American firepower in 2007, including a five-fold increase in air strikes and the use of Spectre gun-ships and artillery in addition to the “surge” was intended as a devastating climax to the past 4 years of war and collective punishment inflicted upon the Iraqi people. All resistance-held areas would be targeted with overwhelming fire-power, mainly from the air, until the US ground forces

could build walls around what remained of each neighbourhood and isolate each district.

The UN Human Rights reports of 2007 mentioned the indiscriminate and illegal attacks against civilians and civilian areas and asked for investigations. Air strikes continued on an almost daily basis until August 2008 even as the so-called “sectarian violence” and US casualties declined. In all the reported incidents where civilians, women and children were killed, Centcom press office declared that the people killed were “terrorists”, “Al Qaeda militants” or “involuntary human shields”.

Read more about the counterinsurgency war in Nicolas J.S. Davies’ excellent book: *Blood on Our Hands, the Invasion and Destruction of Iraq* (Nimble Books LLC 2010) and Max Fuller’s revealing articles.²⁸

Forces involved in “Special Operations”:

Another aspect of the “surge” or escalation appears to have been an increase in the use of the American Special Forces assassination teams. In April 2008 i.e. President Bush declared: “As we speak, US Special Forces are launching multiple operations every night to capture or kill Al-Qaeda leaders in Iraq”²⁹. The NYT reported on 13 May 2009: “When General Stanley McChrystal took over the Joint Special Operations Command in 2003, he inherited an insular, shadowy commando force with a reputation for spurning partnerships with other military and intelligence organizations. But over the next five years he worked hard, his colleagues say, to build close relationships with the C.I.A. and the F.B.I. (...) In Iraq, where he oversaw secret commando operations for five years, former intelligence officials say that he had an encyclopaedic, even obsessive, knowledge about the lives of terrorists, and that he pushed his ranks aggressively to kill as many of them as possible. (...) Most of what General McChrystal has done over a 33-year career remains classified, including service between 2003 and 2008 as commander of the Joint Special Operations Command, an elite unit so clandestine that the Pentagon for years refused to acknowledge its existence.”³⁰ The secrecy surrounding these operations prevented more widespread reporting, but as with earlier US covert operations in Vietnam and Latin America, we will learn more about these operations over time.

- An article in the Sunday Telegraph³¹ points towards clear evidence British special forces are recruiting, training terrorists to heighten ethnic tensions. An elite SAS wing with bloody past in Northern Ireland operates with immunity and provides advanced explosives³². Some attacks are being blamed on Iranians, Sunni insurgents or shadowy terrorist cells such as "Al Qaeda". It is led by Lt. Col. Gordon Kerr, heading the Special Reconnaissance Regiment (SRR), a large counter-terrorism force made up of unnamed "existing assets" from the glory days in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. And America's covert soldiers are right there with them, working side-by-side with their British comrades in the aptly named "Task Force Black," the UK's Sunday Telegraph reported. ³³

- the SWAT teams (Special Weapons and Tactics), extensively used in counter-insurgency operations. The mission of SWAT is to conduct high-risk operations that fall outside the abilities of regular patrol officers to prevent, deter and respond to terrorism and insurgent activities. It was reported that "The foreign internal defense partnership with Coalition Soldiers establishes a professional relationship between the Iraqi Security and Coalition forces where the training builds capable forces. Coalition soldiers working side-by-side with the SWAT teams, both in training and on missions."³⁴ On 7 October 2010 the Official website of US Forces in Iraq reported that "The Basrah SWAT team has trained with various Special Forces units, including the Navy SEALs and the British SAS. The 1st Bn., 68th Arm. Regt., currently under the operational control of United States Division-South and the 1st Infantry Division, has taken up the task of teaching the SWAT team."³⁵

- the Facilities Protection Services (FPS), where the "private contractors" or mercenaries, like Blackwater, are incorporated, are also used in counter-insurgency operations. Ellen Knickmeyer of the Washington Post Foreign Service on Saturday, October 14, 2006 said that the FPS was behind Iraqi Death Squads³⁶. Dahr Jamail and Ali al-Fadhily alleged that The Facilities Protection Service (FPS) created after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 had become the principal set of death squads in Iraq³⁷.

- the Iraq Special Operations Forces (ISOF), probably the largest special forces outfit ever built by the United States, free of many of the controls that most governments

employ to rein in such lethal forces. The project started in Jordan just after the Americans conquered Baghdad in April 2003, to create a deadly, elite, covert unit, fully fitted with American equipment, which would operate for years under US command and be unaccountable to Iraqi ministries and the normal political process. According to Congressional records, the ISOF has grown into nine battalions, which extend to four regional "commando bases" across Iraq. By December 2009 they were fully operational, each with its own "intelligence infusion cell," which will operate independently of Iraq's other intelligence networks. The ISOF is at least 4,564 operatives strong, making it approximately the size of the US Army's own Special Forces in Iraq. Congressional records indicate that there are plans to double the ISOF over the next "several years."³⁸

The divide and rule strategy included also arming indigenous forces and militia's. Sometimes Shia militia's were used by the occupying forces to fight "sunni" resistance groups and when they became too strong, the US armed Sunni groups. A good example is the "Sahwa" Awakening groups or "Sons of Iraq" (SOI). The Awakening groups emerged in 2005 when Sunni tribesmen, who had previously fought the US military and Iraqi government forces, allied with US forces, accepting arms, money and training. It was estimated that by 2008 there were about 100,000 Awakening fighters in Iraq.³⁹ These fighters didn't only fight Al Qaeda, but it was also an effort of the US to break up the Iraqi resistance. In October 2008, the Iraqi government took over from the American military the responsibility for paying 54,000 members of the Awakening councils. Thus far the Iraqi central government has been reluctant to integrate SOI's into official security forces. Many of the Awakening fighters put little trust in the Iraqi government to help employ them. "consider the transfer an act of betrayal by the U.S. Army," said one Awakening member in response to the transfer. As a result, the U.S. military is launching a new civilian job corps to transition some SOI's from security to civil projects. Control of the remaining Sahwas in central, western and north-central Iraq was transferred gradually.

Conclusion: the "dirty war" in Iraq continues. Even as President Barack Obama was announcing the end of combat in Iraq. The US will stay in Iraq. Baghdad decided that 3,000 to 5,000 U.S. troops in a training-only capacity was the most that could be

accommodated.

But the White House is increasing the number of State Department employees in Iraq from 8,000 to an almost unbelievable 16,000, mostly stationed at the elephantine new embassy in Baghdad's Green Zone, in new American consulates in other cities, and in top "advisory" positions in many of the of the regime's ministries, particularly the oil ministry. Half the State Department personnel, 8,000 people, will handle "security" duties, joined by some 5,000 new private "security contractors."

Thus, at minimum the U.S. will possess 13,000 of its own armed "security" forces, and there's still a possibility Baghdad and Washington will work out an arrangement for adding a limited number of military trainers.

The Obama Administration's justification for retaining troops after the end of this year was ostensibly to train the Iraqi military and police forces, but there are other reasons:

- Washington seeks to remain in Iraq to keep an eye on Baghdad because it fears a mutually beneficial alliance may develop between Iraq and neighbouring Iran, weakening American hegemony in the strategically important oil-rich Persian Gulf region and ultimately throughout the Middle East/North Africa.
- The U.S. also seeks to safeguard lucrative economic investments in Iraq, and the huge future profits expected by American corporations, especially in the privatized petroleum sector. Further, Pentagon and CIA forces were stationed — until now, it seems — in close proximity to Iran's western border, a strategic position to invade or bring about regime change.⁴⁰

US officials have made it clear that the CIA plans to continue the programs, which have been run by the Joint Special Operations Command and other military organizations for years, in the country. These programs include different activities such as the deployment of remote sensors that scan the wireless spectrum of terrorist safe havens to stealth US-Iraqi counterterrorism commando teams.⁴¹

In the wake of the troops withdrawal, mass arrests have been made throughout Iraq. Police forces in Basra have arrested about 2312 wanted persons since the beginning of 2011 until 25 June. Most of the arrested were detained on criminal charges, as well as terrorist activities.⁴² Hundreds more have been arrested in the following months in different Iraqi provinces. On 31 October Government security forces arrested 115

civilians during raids and searches carried out in various Iraqi Provinces including Nineveh, Diyala, Baghdad, Saladin, Anbar, Vasiit and Dhi Qar. They also arrested 347 civilians after similar military raids and attacks in many provinces⁴³.

What does the Iraqi resistance have to say about the withdrawal of US troops?

Khdair Al-Murshidi, official spokesperson for one of the unified fractions of the Iraqi resistance: *“The Higher Command of Jihad and Liberation, pointed to the fact that “the intended withdrawal is a result of the defeat of the US at the hands of the valiant Iraqi resistance as led by the Ba’ath party in Iraq alongside all patriotic, national, and Islamic resistance forces and not because of previous security agreements drawn out by the Maliki traitor government and US occupying forces. It is important to understand that this is a significant defeat of the US occupation of Iraq, as conceded by numerous US strategists themselves. It comes from the heavy toll both in human life and material losses that the US occupation has suffered at the hands of the Iraqi resistance.”*

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1 This chapter has been compiled of several official reports, press articles, B*Russell*s Tribunal witness accounts, Max Fuller's articles on the counter-insurgency war (<http://www.brusselstribunal.org/FullerKillings.htm>) and "**Blood On Our Hands, The American Invasion And Destruction Of Iraq**", written by Nicolas J.S. Davies. (Nimble Books LLC, ISBN-10: 193484098X, ISBN-13: 978-1934840986).

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