E-MAIL TO A FRIEND

U.S. May Study Israel Occupation Tactics

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09/19/03: JERUSALEM (AP) -- In an apparent search for pointers on how to police a hostile population, the U.S. military that's trying to bring security to Iraq is showing interest in Israeli software instructing soldiers on how to behave in the West Bank and Gaza, an Israeli military official said Thursday.

Using animated graphics and clips from movies like "Apocalypse Now," the software outlines a "code of conduct" for avoiding abuse of civilians while manning roadblocks, searching homes and conducting other activities, said Lt. Col. Amos Guiora, head of the School of Military Law.

Israeli troops have frequently faced criticism from Palestinian and human rights groups. Two weeks ago, Amnesty International said in a report that Israeli military checkpoints and curfews violate Palestinians' human rights.

U.S. soldiers have also faced criticism in Iraq, where they have been accused of using excessive force.

In a reflection of tensions in Iraq, guerrillas ambushed two U.S. military convoys Thursday, wounding two soldiers. And a nervous American patrol shot at a wedding party late Wednesday, killing a 14-year-old boy and wounding six other people after mistaking celebratory gunfire for an attack, witnesses said.

Guiora told The Associated Press that U.S. military officials had recently seen the software, which was developed this year, and expressed interest. As a result, he said, the military is now working on an English version for them.

A U.S. official with the Embassy in Tel Aviv would say only that American officers have seen the Israeli software and considered it useful.

Guiora said the software was developed after military lawyers found themselves giving dry lectures to disinterested audiences of troops.

"There are complicated issues. The fact that this (software) is so user-friendly, that it has the movie clips, the sounds, the animation - we felt this was the best way," he said.

Israel's military has set up dozens of roadblocks in the West Bank and Gaza to keep suicide bombers out of Israel. But Palestinians say the travel restrictions unfairly make life a misery for millions. In some cases, sick Palestinians heading to hospitals have died at roadblocks.

Human rights groups have also accused troops of using excessive force and said soldiers are often confused about the rules-of-engagement.

The "code of conduct" includes principles such as not shooting at anyone who is surrendering, showing respect for religious and cultural artifacts and providing medical care to anyone injured - conditions permitting.

Guiora said the software, which is currently being distributed to junior commanders in military, also includes scenarios often encountered by troops.

In one, he said, two soldiers drive up to a pile of rocks blocking the road and are told it may be mined. What to do - call mine-clearing experts, remove the rocks themselves, or get some Palestinians to do it? Anyone choosing the last option is disabused by the program.

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