

Special Report

The resort to torture

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March 15, 2005—In his February “diplomatic offensive” tour of Europe, George W. Bush and his media entourage were more interested in fiction and hypocrisy than reality and respect for the rule of law. The tour was designed to garner support for America’s unending wars and imperial conquest sold as “democracy” and “freedom.”

Mr Bush’s most obedient representative in Europe, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, urged Europeans to remember “our shared values” with Americans.

Recently released army documents detail ongoing sadistic abuse, torture and murder of Iraqi prisoners of war (POW) and Iraqi detainees by US and British forces in occupied Iraq. The documents of more than 24,000 pages were released on behalf of the American Civil Liberty Union (ACLU); the Centre for Constitutional Rights (CCR), Physician for Human Rights (PHR), Veterans for Common Sense (VCS) and Veterans for Peace (VP) under the Freedom of Information Act in response to a federal court Order directing the Pentagon and other agencies to comply with the year old request [1].

The new documents and other documents received by the ACLU revealed that the illegal practice of abuse and torture of Iraqi men, women and children took place immediately after the US-led invasion of Iraq. Iraqi POW and Iraqi detainees, not only at Abu Ghraib but also throughout Iraq, were imprisoned, abused, tortured and murdered by British and US soldiers. The practice was secret until Seymour Hersh of *The New Yorker* magazines broke the silence on the complicity of Western media in the crimes against the Iraqi people.

In today’s Iraq, the Occupation forces and their surrogates imprison more than a million Iraqi men, women and children. According to the Occupation mouthpiece, *The New York Times*, in just two major prisons in Iraq, the US military is holding at least 8,900 detainees. At Abu Ghraib there are 3,160 Iraqi prisoners, 660 more than the military’s own recommended level of 2,500 prisoners. The largest US prison, Camp Bucca in the south, has at least 5,600 detainees. There are hundreds of other prisons throughout Iraq. The British occupying forces built their own prisons.

The army documents show that Iraqi POW and detainees were/are subjected to systematic interrogation by Occupation forces that included physical, sexual and psychological abuse and torture. The so-called ‘interrogative techniques’ used by Occupation forces in Iraq and in US prisons around the world draw heavily on the internal report by Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba, providing a long list of “sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal abuses” which include: pointing loaded guns at prisoners; pouring cold water on detainees; bashing detainees with chairs and broom handles; threatening male detainees with anal rape; slamming detainees against cell walls; sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light; using guard dogs to intimidate detainees and, in one instance, setting a dog on a detainee; videotaping naked male and female detainees; forcibly arranging detainees into various sexually explicit positions and photographing them; forcing detainees to remain naked for days; forcing naked male detainees to wear women’s underwear; forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate whilst being videotaped and photographed; arranging detainees in piles and then jumping on them; writing ‘I am a rapist [sic]’ on a detainee and then forcing him to rape a 15-year-old fellow detainee; and placing a dog collar around the neck of naked

detainee and then having a female soldier pose with him for a photograph. This makes a precise fit with the official policy that anything short of killing and decapitating is a legitimate way of breaking people down for interrogation [2].

The Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) reported on 13 May 2004 that an Australian man who is contracted to rebuild oil pipelines in Iraq witnessed terrible abuse of Iraqi prisoners by US soldiers. The man, who was identified as 'Harry,' said recent pictures of American soldiers torturing prisoners are just the 'tip of the iceberg.' 'What you're seeing in the photographs now really is tame,' he said. 'You think about it, these pictures [are ones] that they've published on the net to send to their friends, the real stuff that's going on there is far, far beyond this.' He said that he has 'seen far worse while working in Tikrit,' Iraq.

In an interview with an Iraqi women prisoner at Abu Ghraib, Giuliana Sgrena, of *Il manifesto*, an Italian daily newspaper, reported on 1 July 2004, "Iraqis females are arrested at random by US forces." One Iraqi female prisoner told Sgrena, 'without warning, American soldiers broke into [her home] in the middle of the night, abused us in front of our children, ransacked the place, and then they arrested me. They also took all our papers and keys, and stole our savings.'

At Abu Ghraib women were abused and tortured continuously. 'One of the prisoners had been forced to walk on all fours and her knees and elbows were in a terrible state. Another woman had been forced to separate faeces from urine, using her own hands. The soldiers frequently forced us to drink water from the toilet bowl. A woman of 60, who had said she was a virgin, was continually threatened with rape.' Sometimes they made a hundred or more prisoners lie on the ground and then trampled them underfoot,' reported *Il manifesto*.

In addition to Abu Ghraib where the British are part of the military 'chain of command,' when the abuse and torture of Iraqi civilians occurred, British forces have been involved at all levels in the abuse and torture of Iraqi prisoners and civilians throughout Iraq. In Basra, the British have constructed their own Abu Ghraib, and named it 'Camp Bread Basket.' Despite the high level of crimes committed against the Iraqi people, the British occupiers managed to conceal their crimes until very recently. British media, which have a history of deception and imperialist propaganda, performed its usual duty in keeping the British people well entertained and poorly informed of their government's war crimes. Recent pictures smuggled from inside 'Camp Bread Basket' graphically show how Iraqi prisoners are abused tortured and murdered by British soldiers who have "shared values" with US soldiers. The policy of torture is consistent with Britain's colonial racism in which non-Westerners are regarded as 'unpeople.' It is the British who refined these methods, and who provided the precedent for this "legalised" torture.

This sadistic torture is deeply rooted in Western racism against Muslims, particularly Arabs. Its origin is scholarly invented by hardcore Orientalists (imperialists) who saw the Orient as sexual. "The Middle East is resistant," wrote the late Edward Said, "as any virgin would be," whoever conquers her wins the prize. Those in power easily adopt this distorted picture of the Middle East, which is artificially constructed by Western scholars and pundits.

As Seymour Hersh writes in his *Chain of Command*, "The notion that Arabs are particularly vulnerable to sexual humiliation became a talking point among pro-war Washington conservatives in the months before the March 2003 invasion of Iraq." He continues; "One book that was frequently cited was *The Arab Mind*. . . the book includes a 25-page chapter on Arabs and sex, depicting sex as a taboo vested with shame and repression." The book as I know it, is a piece of collected old imperial rubbish about the Arab peoples by the racist American anthropologist, Raphael Patai. That it is the Bush administration's bible on the Arab peoples is of great concern. Patai described the Middle East as a "culture area" with no plurality of differences and readily available for generalisation of nonsense.

The book, a piece of rubbish, is resurrected to become the textbook for the US military on the Middle East. "None of the academics I contacted thought the book suitable for serious study, although Georgetown University once invited students to analyse it as 'an example of bad, biased social science,'" writes Brian Whitaker of the *Guardian* of London. "There is a lot wrong with *The Arab Mind* apart from its

racism: the title, for a start. Although the Arab countries certainly have their distinctive characteristics, the idea that 200 million people, from Morocco to the Gulf, living in rural villages, urban metropolises and (very rarely these days) desert tents, think with some sort of single, collective mind is utterly ridiculous," he added.

Alfred McCoy, a professor of history at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, analysed the CIA practice of torture over half-century, in Vietnam, Latin America and Iran, and marvelled at the recklessness of Western media commentators and pundits. He writes; "In weighing personal liberty versus public safety, all those pro-pain pundits were ignorant of torture's complexity perverse psychopathology, that leads to both uncontrolled proliferation of the practice [of torture] and long-term damage to the perpetrator society"[3]. The practice is morally repugnant in any civilised society.

The documents released by the ACLU reveal that the practice of abuse and torture, which is now an established process of the US and British administrations, has been facilitated and approved by the White House and Whitehall. It is not an isolated behaviour of a "few bad apples" who suddenly appeared in the US-British military in Iraq, as propagandised by the mainstream media. The documents shows that the US administration is guilty of gross violations of human rights and of a "systematic decision to alter the use of methods of coercion and torture that lay outside of accepted and legal norms."

In April 2003, the Defence Department approved 'interrogation techniques' for use at Guantanamo Bay prison, and then passed them to Iraq, *The Washington Post* reported on May 09, 2004. Further, "[p]erhaps the strongest evidence that the abuse of prisoners in US hands has been systemic, not aberrant, is the simplest: it is the fact that those involved felt it was quite safe to be photographed repeatedly while committing it," writes Stephen Sedley, a judge of the court of appeal for England and Wales.

Kenneth Roth, executive director of the US-based Human Rights Watch, said these techniques outlined in the US document and approved by the Pentagon amount to cruel and inhumane treatment. "The courts have ruled most of these techniques illegal," he said. "If it's illegal here under the U.S. Constitution, it's illegal abroad . . . This isn't even close." The fact that the Bush administration used fake torture stories to influence public opinion to support the war on Iraq constitutes abuse of public trust. For example, the bogus story of Jumana Hanna, a prostitute, of torture and rape was amplified in *The Washington Post* in July 2003, and used by the war-hungry Deputy Defence Secretary Paul Wolfowitz in his testimony to the US Senate to justify his "moral" war on Iraq.

Alberto Gonzales, the new US attorney general, was the White House legal counsel before the invasion of Iraq. In his memorandum of 25 January 2002, Mr. Gonzales advised the Bush administration, that the Geneva Convention does not cover POW and detainees of America's "war on terror" or the "new paradigm" as Mr. Gonzales called it. In "my judgment" he writes, "this new paradigm renders obsolete Geneva's strict limitations on questioning of enemy prisoners and renders quaint some of its provisions."

Gonzales' advice amount to war crimes under Title 18 U.S.C. section 2441 (The War Crimes Act). The War Crimes Act defines as war crimes: grave breaches of the Geneva Conventions, and violations of Article 3 common to the Geneva Conventions. Section 130 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War (Third Geneva Convention) defines as grave breaches of that convention: "willful killing, torture or inhuman treatment," and "willfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health." Those who followed Mr Gonzales advice are equally guilty of war crimes against the Iraqi people. A detailed case against Mr Gonzales has been laid out by Marjorie Cohn, a professor of law at Thomas Jefferson School of Law [4].

"It's difficult for me to understand why nobody was held accountable for the abuse of detainees here. There's no justification for kicking an enemy [POW] when he's wounded on the ground in front of you and about to die," said Jamil Jaffer, one of the ACLU lawyers.

Furthermore, in early June 2004, Ruud Lubbers, then-UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, condemned the "willful killing, torture and inhuman treatment" of Iraqis, calling it a "grave breach" of

international law that “might be designated as war crimes by a competent tribunal.” The scandal was, the commissioner added, recognised by even ‘Coalition leaders’ as “a stain upon the effort to bring freedom to Iraq.”

The West’s “shared values” have never stood lower in the eyes of Arabs and Muslims in general. Americans and British at home should know that their governments are isolated in their old-style adventure of colonialism, and that the resort to torture is a criminal practice. They can join the international community in repudiating a practice that constitutes gross violations of human rights and dignity.

The systematic policy of abuse, torture and murder of Iraqi POW and Iraqi civilians by the US and British forces has exposed the lie that the war was to “liberate” the Iraqi people and to spread “freedom” and “democracy.” The new tyranny is an old tyranny in every aspect of life. The only way to end the abuse, torture and murder of the Iraqi people is to end of the Occupation of Iraq.

Resources:

- [1]. [American Civil Liberties Union](#)
- [2]. [The Taguba Report](#)
- [3]. Alfred W. McCoy, [Cruel Science: CIA Torture & U.S. Foreign Policy](#), NEJPP, 2005.
- [4]. Marjorie Cohn, [The Gonzales Indictment](#), t r u t h o u t, 19 January 2005.

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