

US war crimes

Torture of Iraqi prisoners exposed

Richard Phillips
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On April 29, CBS television's "60 Minutes II" program screened graphic images of Iraqi prisoners being tortured and sexually humiliated by US troops at the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad. The photographs, which show American soldiers—men and women—smiling, laughing or giving thumbs-up signs alongside naked Iraqi prisoners, expose the sadistic and brutal methods employed by American forces and provide more evidence of the catalog of war crimes being committed by US-led forces in Iraq.

One of the pictures shows an Iraqi prisoner standing on a box with a hood over his head. Electric wires are attached to his hands. He was told that if he fell off the box he would be electrocuted. Another photograph is of naked male detainees stacked in a pyramid shape, one of the men has a slur written on his skin in English. In some pictures, prisoners are positioned to simulate sex with each other while US troops point and laugh.

The photos have surfaced in connection with the suspension in March of 17 members of the 800th Military Police Brigade for mistreatment and abuse of prisoners at Abu Ghraib prison in November and December of last year. The jail was infamous for torture and executions under the Saddam Hussein regime.

Six of those suspended were charged with dereliction of duty, cruelty and maltreatment, assault and indecent acts—the military's term for sexual abuse—and could be court-martialed and jailed.

Military investigators have also recommended that disciplinary action be brought against seven US officers in charge of the prison, including Brigadier General Janis Karpinski, the 800th Brigade's commander.

While the US Army revealed these violations last month, it has attempted to prevent any detailed information leaking to the media. Army officials,

however, were forced to appear on the high-rating television program after other news outlets were given copies of the photographs.

The Army told "60 Minutes II" that it had numerous photos, including a picture of a detainee with electric wires attached to his genitals, a dog attacking an Iraqi prisoner and a dead Iraqi prisoner who had been badly beaten at the prison. One civilian interrogator had smashed several tables in order to "fear up" prisoners.

The television show also revealed that the Army is investigating allegations by an Iraqi detainee that a prison translator at Abu Ghraib raped a male juvenile detainee. Part of the prisoner's testimony states: "They covered all the doors with sheets. I heard the screaming ... and the female soldier was taking pictures."

These acts of sadism and cruelty constitute a blatant violation of the "UN Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment" and are war crimes as defined by Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions on the treatment of war prisoners.

Article 3 prohibits:

- a. violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture;
- b. taking hostages;
- c. outrages upon personal dignity, in particular humiliating and degrading treatment.

Army Brigadier General Mark Kimmitt, deputy chief of military operations in Iraq, told "60 Minutes II" that the torture was "reprehensible" and claimed that those facing charges were "not representative" of American soldiers in Iraq. "Don't judge your army by the actions of a few," he said. Americans "need to understand that is not the Army."

These mendacious comments were refuted by CBS's chilling interview with Army Reserve Staff Sergeant

Chip Frederick, one of those facing court martial.

Frederick, a Virginia prison guard, is charged with assaulting detainees, ordering prisoners to strike each other and an “indecent act” for observing one of the sexual abuse incidents. He insisted, however, that his actions were not those of a rogue soldier, but were sanctioned and encouraged by military intelligence and the CIA.

Along with other reservist jail guards, he was directed to physically and mentally “prepare” Iraqi detainees for interrogation. He said that dogs were also used as “intimidation factors” against prisoners.

One of Frederick’s email messages said: “Military intelligence has encouraged and told us ‘Great job.’ They usually don’t allow others to watch them interrogate. But since they like the way I run the prison, they have made an exception. We help getting them [detainees] to talk with the way we handle them.... We’ve had a very high rate with our style of getting them to break. They usually end up breaking within hours.”

As these comments make clear, torture in US-run Iraqi prisons is an integral part of the illegal occupation. A systematic process of brutalization is being directed from the upper ranks.

At the same time, the fact that US soldiers are employing methods similar to those used by the Nazis in World War II is indicative of a deep-seated state of demoralization and degradation that the occupation has bred within the US military. Finding themselves in a hostile environment with the vast majority of Iraqis opposing the occupation, many American soldiers have come to see the country’s entire population as the enemy. Fed lies about the colonial intervention in Iraq being part of a global “war on terrorism,” some have also assumed a license to torture and humiliate their helpless captives.

Contrary to Kimmitt’s claims—slavishly echoed by the corporate media—this is the logic and modus operandi of imperialist conquest and colonial occupation. The pictures of torture, brutality and sexual sadism are representative of the entire criminal operation being conducted in Iraq.

Washington anticipated and prepared in advance for the war crimes now being committed against the Iraqi people. No criminal charges can be brought against a US soldier in Iraq because the puppet Iraqi Governing

Council has given the American military a blanket amnesty from prosecution. Secondly, with the backing of Germany and a number of other countries, no US soldier or citizen can be prosecuted for war crimes in the International Criminal Court.

The “60 Minutes II” broadcast has provided only a partial glimpse of the crimes being carried out by US forces in Iraq and elsewhere. The conditions in Iraqi jails, where over 18,000 prisoners are being held, are replicated in a network of US-run concentration camps around the world. These include Guantanamo Bay, Diego Garcia, Bagram Air Base in Afghanistan. According to current estimates, the US is incarcerating over 25,000 detainees in these hellholes, in violation of the Geneva Conventions.



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