

# Rumsfeld, Rice tied to torture in Iraq

**Bill Van Auken****19 June 2004**

An unrelenting series of leaks, charges and reports have removed any doubt that top officials in the Bush administration bear direct responsibility for the criminal torture inflicted upon prisoners held by the US military in Iraq as well as other blatant violations of the Geneva Conventions.

On Thursday, US Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld acknowledged that he personally ordered the military to hold an Iraqi prisoner incommunicado for nearly eight months, concealing his detention from the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Rumsfeld said he issued the order in response to a personal request from the recently resigned director of the Central Intelligence Agency, George Tenet, following the capture of an Iraqi alleged to be a leading member of Ansar al-Islam. This Kurdish Islamist group had opposed Saddam Hussein's secular nationalist regime and then became active in the resistance to the US military occupation of Iraq.

The secret detention and concealment from the Red Cross—in direct violation of international law—follows a pattern that has emerged with the torture revelations at the Abu Ghraib prison in Baghdad and reports emerging from a global network of secret US detention camps.

At Abu Ghraib, prisoners that US authorities wanted to subject to extensive interrogation—as well as torture—were held without charges, never entered into the prison's roster, and moved about within the prison to prevent the International Red Cross from monitoring their treatment. They were known in the parlance of the military police guards and the US Army and CIA contract interrogators as “ghost detainees.”

At a Pentagon press conference, Rumsfeld insisted that the Kurdish prisoner—known only as “Triple X”—was not a “ghost detainee.” Pressed on what was the distinction, the Defense Secretary answered testily, “It's just different.”

One difference was that the CIA spirited “Triple X” out of Iraq, holding him for nearly three months at an undisclosed location until it determined that, as an Iraqi citizen, he should be returned to the country and handed back to the military.

His treatment was all-too typical of the combination of brutality, arrogance and incompetence that has characterized the US military's handling of the tens of thousands of Iraqis it has rounded up and imprisoned. Subjected to a cursory interrogation when he was first brought to the Camp Cropper, a detention center located at Baghdad's international airport, he

was never questioned again by either military or CIA officers.

Instead, he disappeared in the occupation's detention system. Citing an unnamed senior intelligence official, the *New York Times* reported that “the CIA inquired about the detainee's status in January, but was told that American jailers in Iraq could not find him, perhaps as a result of the chaos and confusion of the November and December spike in insurgent violence.”

In addition to Rumsfeld's admitted role in ordering this illegal concealment of prisoners, further evidence of the defense secretary's responsibility for the atrocities at Abu Ghraib and other US detention centers emerged Thursday with a proposal by two Democratic members of the Senate Judiciary Committee to subpoena secret administration documents spelling out policy on the treatment of individuals incarcerated by the US military.

Among the 23 memos, reports and letters identified in the subpoena request was a directive issued by Rumsfeld to Gen. James Hill, the chief of the Southern Command, which coordinates US military operations in Latin America. The title of the document was “Coercive interrogation techniques that can be used with approval of the Defense Secretary.”

A second document, issued by the legal adviser to Lt. Gen. Ricardo Sanchez, the senior US military officer in Iraq, to military intelligence and military police contingents at the Abu Ghraib prison bore the title, “New plan to restrict Red Cross access to Abu Ghraib.”

The Republican majority on the Senate Judiciary Committee killed the proposal to subpoena the documents. On the pretext of the need for secrecy and unlimited executive power in the “war on terrorism,” the panel's chairman, Senator Orrin Hatch, declared, “We should not reveal our interrogation techniques to our enemies.”

In reality, the repulsive photographs from Abu Ghraib and the testimony of Afghans, Iraqis and others who have survived brutal interrogations, beatings, sexual assaults and other forms of torture have already revealed these “techniques” to the world.

In another development indicating direct Bush administration responsibility for the atrocities at Abu Ghraib, *USA Today* on Friday cited a sworn statement given by the US Army officer responsible for interrogations at the prison to the effect that the White House itself was exerting “pressure” upon the military to

“pull the intelligence out of” the detainees held there.

In his statement to Army investigators, Lt. Col. Steven Jordan revealed that a top aide to National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice came to the prison last November for an inspection that centered “purely on detainee operations and reporting.”

Pressure to extract more information from the detainees was also relayed by his immediate superior, Col. Thomas Pappas, a senior Army intelligence officer, Jordan said. According to the statement quoted in *USA Today*, Pappas told him “that some of the [intelligence] reporting was getting read by Rumsfeld, folks at Langley [the headquarters of the CIA], some very senior folks.”

Though Jordan himself has not been formally charged with wrongdoing in connection with the systematic torture and abuse at Abu Ghraib, Maj. Gen. Antonio Taguba, the officer the Army sent to investigate conditions there, recommended his reassignment, finding that he had lied to investigators. Jordan claimed that he was unaware of the treatment of the detainees, who were stripped naked, beaten, sexually assaulted and subjected to other forms of torture. Other witnesses, however, said he was present when these assaults took place and was intimately involved in the interrogations.

Meanwhile, a military trial is set to begin next week for four of the seven Army reservists, all low-ranking enlisted personnel, who have been charged with abusing prisoners at Abu Ghraib.

The hypocrisy of these proceedings and of the administration’s claims that the torture at Abu Ghraib was the work of a handful of depraved individuals grows more glaring by the day. There is no question that the administration set the general policy of denying prisoners of the US occupation internationally guaranteed rights and thereby legitimizing torture on the specious grounds that they were “enemy combatants,” a term that has no validity under the Geneva Conventions.

The documentary evidence that has emerged in recent days makes it clear that the administration’s most senior officials were directing and following the use of torture and illegal forms of detention. The recent revelations include the publication by the *Washington Post* of a leaked 2002 Justice Department memo asserting the president’s “constitutional power” to ignore international anti-torture treaties and carry out whatever forms of cruelty against detainees he sees fit.

There is little doubt that the sadist in the White House has taken a personal interest in the ghoulish methods employed by military and CIA interrogators as well as private contractors at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan and a number of secret detention and torture camps scattered around the globe.

This is not a matter, however, of just a handful of criminals in the White House, any more than that of a handful of depraved reservists. The methods of torture are the inevitable byproduct

of a criminal war of aggression. The attempt to subjugate the people of Iraq and expropriate the country’s oil resources has provoked a growing movement of popular resistance. Lacking any base of support for a continued US military presence and any reliable collaborators, the occupation authorities desperately seek intelligence that can be used to combat the mass insurgency. As with the French in Algeria, the US in Vietnam and every other colonial war, torture is the means for extracting such information.

This is understood and accepted not only by the Bush White House, but also by its ostensible political opponents in the Democratic Party. While the evidence clearly implicates the Bush administration in war crimes, the Democrats have no desire to make the torture revelations a campaign issue.

In a hypocritical gesture Thursday, the US Senate voted unanimously to tack on a provision to a massive military spending bill affirming the desirability of Washington complying with international treaties against torture.

The measure was approved by a voice vote, which discreetly avoided any debate on whether torture is a legitimate tool in the never-ending “war on terrorism” proclaimed by both parties. After the vote, both Republican and Democratic Senators told the press that they had reservations about forswearing the use of torture.

“I think it’s unwise for us to announce in concrete the absolute limits of the military in wartime,” declared Sen. Jeff Sessions, an Alabama Republican.

Charles Schumer, the senior Democratic Senator from New York, said he likewise was uncertain that torture should be ruled out. “We are in a brave new world,” he said.

During Attorney General John Ashcroft’s testimony before the Judiciary Committee last week on anti-terrorism policy, Schumer was somewhat more explicit. “It’s easy to sit back in an armchair and say that torture can never be used,” he said. “But when you’re in a foxhole, it’s a very different deal.”



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