

Wall Street Journal alibis for Nazi-style crimes in Iraq

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In an editorial titled “As bad as the Nazis,” the *Wall Street Journal* Monday launched a smear campaign against the International Committee of the Red Cross, while attempting to cover up the crimes carried out by the US military in the illegal war in Iraq.

The newspaper’s editorial board, whose right-wing writings closely reflect prevailing opinion within the Bush administration, feigned outrage at an alleged incident in which an exasperated Red Cross official compared the US personnel at Camp Bucca, a detention camp in Iraq, to Nazi concentration camp guards.

The real source of the *Journal*’s ire, however, was the ICRC’s May 19 statement revealing that it had repeatedly complained to US authorities over the abuses against the Koran at the Guantánamo Bay prison camp that were referred to in a brief report published by *Newsweek* magazine earlier this month.

The ICRC’s account cut across a campaign orchestrated by the Bush administration to exploit a technical error in the story in order to portray the well-documented charges over the Koran as a media fabrication. *Newsweek* and the rest of the mass media cravenly acquiesced to this campaign, helping to assure its success and allowing the administration to imply that the long list of revelations of US crimes, from Abu Ghraib on, were all merely the slanderous inventions of a “biased” press.

The ICRC statement, the *Journal* complains, “came just as the US was scrambling to undo the damage in the Muslim world from the discredited *Newsweek* story.”

This is patent nonsense. The “damage in the Muslim world” came not from a two-paragraph item in *Newsweek*, but from the wars of aggression, mass detentions, torture and murder carried out by the Bush administration from Iraq to Guantánamo over the course of nearly four years. The magazine’s story at most provided an incidental spark that ignited the explosive outrage against US policies and practices that exists throughout the region.

The *Journal* editorial attributes the ICRC statement to an “ideological” inclination by the ICRC to “embarrass the United States, however unfairly.” As to the source of this alleged bias, the editorial provides not a clue.

The ICRC itself, however, made it fairly clear why it chose to break its usual silence on what it finds in its inspections and speak out on the Koran issue.

“Since these reports have become public in other channels, and because of their impact in Afghanistan and around the world, we decided we could report that we had brought this to authorities’ attention and that our work had value,” the organization’s spokesman Simon Schorno said last week.

In other words, the ICRC was attempting to defend its own credibility in the region, making clear that it had spoken out and was not complicit in the brutal abuse of detainees. It begins not from Washington’s propaganda spin, but from the reality that the charges against the US are correctly believed by millions throughout the Muslim world.

As for why the ICRC would have a conflictive relationship with

Washington, the explanation is not to be found in some hidden ideological agenda, as the *Journal* suggests, but in the employment by US authorities of extra-legal measures that repudiate the treaties under which the organization operates, including the Geneva Conventions.

In Iraq and elsewhere, this has meant denying Red Cross inspectors access to US-run detention facilities and hiding so-called “ghost” detainees within them.

Echoing the logic used by those who have erected Washington’s worldwide network of detention camps and torture centers, the *Journal* dismisses as “absurd” an earlier International Red Cross report that denounced the indefinite imprisonment without charges of the Guantánamo detainees as “tantamount to torture.”

The *Journal*’s editors note that the ICRC had also complained that Washington had refused to grant the Guantánamo detainees prisoner of war status, adding, “POWs are explicitly allowed by the Geneva Conventions to be held indefinitely—that is, for the duration of a conflict.”

This cynical piece of sophistry essentially boils down to an assertion that the US is bound by no law and can do whatever it wants with anyone it chooses to brand as a “terrorist.” The “conflict” that it refers to—the Bush administration’s “global war on terrorism”—is a pretext for never-ending US wars of aggression abroad. Bush and others have declared that this so-called war will last for decades, meaning that the American administration arrogates to itself the right to detain anyone for as long as they live, without having to produce a shred of evidence against them.

What about the *Journal*’s self-righteous umbrage over the alleged Nazi reference? The editorialists themselves acknowledge that news of their planned editorial had leaked before its publication Monday. Warnings appeared on the Internet, they wrote, “that we were out to smear the ICRC.”

This is no doubt the case—however much the editorialists deny it. But can an accusation—whether true or false—that someone has compared what is happening inside US detention camps to the practices of the Nazis really be considered a smear?

If the remark was indeed made, it undoubtedly slipped out in a moment of anger and frustration on the part of an ICRC official who was being stonewalled, if not threatened, by the US military. These officials are trained in the art of diplomacy and tend to avoid such plain speech so as not to prejudice their access to places where Nazi-style torture and abuse take place.

Clearly, Camp Bucca is not the equivalent of Auschwitz or Treblinka, where the Nazis systematically exterminated millions in the gas chambers. But there is an undeniable connection between the methods that produced those historic crimes and the methods that have given rise to the US-organized atrocities against the Iraqi people.

Denying any desire to “smear” the ICRC, the *Journal* states, “We are trying to understand how a representative of an organization pledged to neutrality and the honest investigation of detainee practices could compare American soldiers to the Nazi SS.”

Well, they might begin by re-reading the report issued by Major General Antonio Taguba on the undeniable abuses at Abu Ghraib prison and Camp Bucca. Following the release of photographs of torture and sexual abuse at Abu Ghraib, the Pentagon had no choice but to investigate and issue this report as a form of damage control. Given its source, the document is a telling indication of the depravity that dominates the US enterprise in Iraq.

Among the “intentional abuse of detainees by military police personnel” listed by Taguba were the following:

- * punching, slapping and kicking detainees; jumping on their naked feet;
- * videotaping and photographing naked male and female detainees.
- * forcibly arranging detainees in various sexually explicit positions for photographing;
- * forcing detainees to remove their clothing and keeping them naked for several days at a time;
- * forcing naked male detainees to wear women’s underwear;
- * forcing groups of male detainees to masturbate themselves while being photographed and videotaped;
- * arranging naked male detainees in a pile and then jumping on them;
- * positioning a naked detainee on a box [of meals ready to eat], with a sandbag on his head, and attaching wires to his fingers, toes and penis to simulate electric torture;
- * writing “I am a Rape” (sic) on the leg of a detainee alleged to have forcibly raped a 15-year-old fellow detainee, and then photographing him naked;
- * placing a dog chain or strap around a naked detainee’s neck and having a female soldier pose for a picture;
- * a male MP [military police] guard having sex with a female detainee;
- * using military working dogs (without muzzles) to intimidate and frighten detainees, and in at least one case biting and severely injuring a detainee;
- * taking photographs of dead Iraqi detainees.

In addition to these acts—which could not be denied because of photographic or videotape evidence—the general said he found “credible” descriptions by detainees of other acts, including:

- * breaking chemical lights and pouring the phosphoric liquid on detainees;
- * threatening detainees with a charged 9-millimeter pistol;
- * pouring cold water on naked detainees;
- * beating detainees with a broom handle and a chair;
- * threatening male detainees with rape;
- * allowing a military police guard to stitch the wound of a detainee who was injured after being slammed against the wall in his cell;
- * sodomizing a detainee with a chemical light and perhaps a broomstick.

Or, the *Journal* might arrive at a better understanding of the analogy between the Nazis and Camp Bucca by reviewing the testimony of Hossam Shaltout, an Egyptian-born Canadian citizen and permanent US resident detained by the US military in Iraq in 2003.

“He described Camp Bucca as a ‘torture camp,’ where soldiers beat and humiliated prisoners—including having them lie naked atop each other or pose in sexual positions,” the Knight Ridder news agency reported. “Shaltout said he saw soldiers tie groups of naked prisoners together. He said they hogtied his hands and legs and placed scorpions on his body. ‘American soldiers love scorpions,’ Shaltout said.”

“They did unspeakable things to Iraqis,” Shaltout told CBC last year. “They wanted confessions,” he said. “A lot of people didn’t have anything to confess.”

Last February a group of Muslim clerics in Baghdad cited letters from detainees recounting horrific forms of abuse, including US guards breaking prisoners’ legs, smashing their fingers and forcing them to sit for hours inside large freezers.

Then there was a December *Washington Post* report citing the experience of Ahnad Naje Dulaimi, a 23-year-old Baghdad waiter picked

up for interrogation and sent to Camp Bucca. He was confronted with a American male and female and a Kuwaiti interpreter. “The male soldier strode into the room, Dulaimi said, and immediately urinated on his head,” the *Post* reported.

The military has itself been forced to confirm some of the abuse at Bucca. Four soldiers from the 320th Military Police Battalion were charged with systematically beating prisoners. Two soldiers would hold the detainees’ legs apart while a third kicked them in the groin.

Is this not precisely the style of the Nazi bullyboys? And, isn’t the twisted ideology underlying it similar to that propagated by the Third Reich among its troops sent to conquer Poland and Russia? Those they confronted were subhumans or *Untermenschen* and therefore no restrictions applied to the cruelty that could be inflicted upon them.

And the purpose of this cruelty is also much the same today as it was in occupied Europe 60 years ago. Human rights organizations have credibly estimated that 90 percent of those who are arrested and detained by US forces have nothing to do with the armed struggle against the occupation. No matter how much they are tortured, they indeed have nothing to confess. But their brutalization is aimed at terrorizing the population, physically intimidating it into withdrawing support for the resistance.

Even more importantly, the source of the crimes in Iraq and of those committed by Hitler’s SS is in essence the same: the launching of a criminal war of aggression.

This was the finding of the Nuremberg Trials, which found that all of the crimes of Nazism flowed from Hitler’s regime having planned and executed an aggressive war.

The Geneva Conventions of 1949 were enacted in response to the Nazi crimes in occupied Europe. Having embarked on an unprovoked war of aggression and embraced a policy of “preventive war,” it is hardly an accident that the Bush administration has repudiated these very conventions, finding them, in the words of former White House counsel and current US Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, “quaint.”

The conclusion of the *Wall Street Journal*’s editorial is that it is time to do away with the 140-year-old International Committee of the Red Cross as well. “The world needs a truly neutral humanitarian body of the sort the ICRC is supposed to be,” it states. “But the Camp Bucca incident ... is evidence it isn’t currently up to the task.”

The journalistic warmongers at the *Journal*, reflecting the views of their patrons in the Bush White House, cannot tolerate any challenge to US policy or to Washington’s falsification and cover-up of its criminal activity in Iraq. Those who cannot be cowed, as *Newsweek* has been, must be eliminated.



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