

Amnesty International condemns human rights abuses committed in US-led “war on terror”

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Amnesty International’s annual human rights report, released on May 23, focussed on the abrogation of democratic rights and other abuses committed by governments around the world in the name of the US-led “war on terror.” It targeted the United States and its key ally, Britain, for particular criticism.

Amnesty’s catalogue of human rights violations underscores the Bush administration’s role as an international agent of criminality and corruption.

The press release announcing the publication of its 2006 report was headed, “World’s poor and disadvantaged pay price of war on terror.” The organisation’s secretary general, Irene Khan, declared: “Governments collectively and individually paralysed international institutions and squandered public resources in pursuit of narrow security interests, sacrificed principles in the name of the ‘war on terror’ and turned a blind eye to massive human rights violations. As a result, the world has paid a heavy price, in terms of erosion of fundamental principles and in the enormous damage done to the lives and livelihoods of ordinary people.”

The human rights group condemned the Bush administration for its defence of torture and indefinite detention without trial. “Hypocrisy and a disregard for basic human rights principles and international legal obligations continued to mark the USA’s ‘war on terror,’” the report stated. “Despite mounting evidence that the US government had sanctioned ‘disappearances’ as well as interrogation techniques constituting torture and other ill-treatment, there was a failure to hold officials at the highest levels accountable, including individuals who may have been responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity.”

Amnesty noted that at the end of 2005, approximately 14,000 people remained in US-run detention centres in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantánamo Bay, “without any prospect of being charged or facing a fair trial.” The organisation repeated its demand that the US shut the Guantánamo Bay

detention centre and denounced the torture and mistreatment of detainees.

The report noted that evidence continued to emerge of US and European involvement in the operation of an international network of secret detention facilities (known as “black sites”), as well as the illegal transfer or rendition of alleged terrorists to countries with notorious human rights records. It characterised these practices as outsourcing torture. “The ‘export value’ of the ‘war on terror’ has not decreased,” the report stated. “With the tacit or explicit approval of the USA, countries like Egypt, Jordan and Yemen continue to detain, without charge or fair trial, people suspected of involvement in terrorism.”

Amnesty pointed to the international ramifications of the Bush administration’s open disregard for fundamental precepts of international law in that authoritarian states around the world have justified their own repressive measures by referring to alleged domestic terrorist threats. The report detailed instances of this in countries including China, Uzbekistan, Egypt, Singapore, Kenya and Turkey.

It also described the ongoing attack on democratic rights in those countries most closely aligned with the Bush administration’s “war on terror.”

In Britain, Amnesty noted, “The [Blair] government continued to erode fundamental human rights, the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary, including by persisting with attempts to undermine the ban on torture at home and abroad, and by enacting and seeking to enact legislation inconsistent with domestic and international human rights law.”

The report detailed the far-reaching measures contained in the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, which allowed the government to impose restrictions on people’s movement and activities, known as “control orders,” on the basis of secret intelligence. “The imposition of ‘control orders’ was tantamount to the executive ‘charging’, ‘trying’ and ‘sentencing’ a person without the fair trial guarantees

required in criminal cases,” Amnesty wrote.

The material presented in the report amounted to a damning indictment of the so-called war on terror. The reality is that the “war on terror” has nothing to do with protecting ordinary citizens from the threat of Al Qaeda and other terrorist organisations. This threat has been exploited by governments in the US, Britain and other countries to tear up longstanding constitutional norms, attack democratic rights and create the framework for police states. The “war on terror” has also played a critical role in the Bush administration’s increasingly reckless drive to bolster its position against its imperialist rivals in Europe and Asia and to secure critical economic and energy resources.

Amnesty’s annual report presented a stark picture of the horrific conditions in Iraq and Afghanistan. Both countries, which remain under occupation by US-led forces, have been described by the Bush administration and its allies as liberated countries on the path to democracy. The human rights situation in the two countries, however, remains among the worst in the world.

In Iraq, Amnesty International commented: “Both the US-led Multinational Force (MNF) and Iraqi security forces committed grave human rights violations, including torture and ill-treatment, arbitrary detention without charge or trial, and excessive use of force resulting in civilian deaths.”

At the end of November last year, more than 14,000 detainees were being held in the four main US-run detention centres in Iraq: Abu Ghraib, Camp Cropper, Camp Bucca and Fort Suse. Amnesty condemned the occupation authorities for holding most of the detainees for weeks without permitting access to lawyers and family members of those interned. At least 1,400 detainees had been held in the camps for more than a year without charge.

The report condemned the widespread practice of torture by the Iraqi security forces. “Methods of torture included hanging by the arms, burning with cigarettes, beatings, the use of electric shocks on different parts of the body, strangulation, the breaking of limbs and sexual abuse.” Amnesty reported that such crimes occurred in police stations, secret detention facilities, and in buildings controlled by the Interior Ministry.

The Kurdish nationalist parties in control of northern Iraq have also committed human rights abuses. Amnesty criticised Patriotic Union of Kurdistan gunmen for shooting into a crowd of people protesting against fuel shortages and poor public services last September. One person was killed and 30 wounded in the attack. Last December a Kurdish writer, Kamal Sayid Qadir, was sentenced to 30 years imprisonment after a rigged trial on defamation charges relating to his published criticisms of Kurdish nationalist rule.

In Afghanistan, Amnesty painted a damning portrait of the US-backed government under President Hamid Karzai. “Many regional officials and commanders—often called warlords—continued to wield power within Afghanistan. Some continued to maintain links with armed groups responsible for abuses that included war crimes committed since 1979-1980, including mass killings and rape,” the report noted.

“All stages of the legal process were hampered by corruption, the influence of armed groups, lack of oversight mechanisms, non-payment of salaries and inadequate infrastructure,” it went on. “Detainees continued to be held unlawfully for prolonged periods and denied a fair trial. There were reports of inhumane conditions in prisons.”

The US-led occupation forces in the country continue to be responsible for war crimes and human rights violations. Amnesty reported that hundreds of people are still arbitrarily detained by US forces, outside of any oversight from Afghan courts, UN human rights observers and, in some cases, the International Committee of the Red Cross. “Excessive use of force during arrest and torture and ill-treatment inside Bagram airbase and other US facilities continued to be reported,” the report stated.

As in Iraq, Amnesty also criticised the US-led foreign forces for conducting military operations in Afghanistan without taking all necessary precautions to prevent the death and injury of civilians.

The Bush administration immediately dismissed Amnesty International’s report. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack attacked the organisation for not assisting the trial of Saddam Hussein. “They’ve done zero, zip, nothing to assist in those efforts,” he declared on May 23. “So in terms of where they might focus some of their efforts, I would just offer the humble suggestion that they might follow through in actually assisting with or providing some support to this trial.”

Washington’s response to Amnesty’s charges was little different to that of numerous despotic governments around the world. The 238-page report provided a comprehensive summary of human rights abuses in 150 countries, covering a wide range of issues including the effects of civil wars and other conflicts, AIDS, extreme poverty, and discrimination against women, homosexuals and ethnic minorities.



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