

FBI files indict Bush, Cheney and Co. as war criminals

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The most stunning revelation in a 370-page Justice US Department Inspector General's report released this week was that agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation had formally opened a "War Crimes" file, documenting torture they had witnessed at the Guantánamo Bay US prison camp, before being ordered by the administration to stop writing their reports.

The *World Socialist Web Site*, together with human rights groups and other opponents of US militarism and repression, has long insisted that the actions of the Bush administration—the launching of wars of aggression, assassinations, the abduction and detention of civilians without trial and, most repugnant of all, torture—constitute war crimes under any legitimate interpretation of longstanding international statutes and treaties.

To have this assessment confirmed, however, by the IG of the Justice Department, the only senior official there not answerable directly to the White House, and by agents of the FBI, an agency not known for its sensitivity to questions of democratic rights, is an indication of the rampant character of these crimes as well as the crisis they have engendered within the US government and America's ruling elite as a whole.

The report makes it absolutely clear that torture was ordered and planned in detail at the highest levels of the government—including the White House, the National Security Council, the Pentagon and the Justice Department. Attempts to stop it on legal or pragmatic grounds by individuals within the government were systematically suppressed, and evidence of this criminal activity covered up.

There was no immediate reaction from the White House on these new revelations. Responses from other agencies directly implicated in the crimes at Guantánamo were indicative of the general atmosphere of impunity in which the torture detailed in the IG's report continues to this day.

"There's nothing new here," said Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman. A State Department spokesman, meanwhile, described the charges contained in the report as "pretty vague."

Pretty vague? One can't help but wonder what the spokesman would consider explicit. The report contains page after page of testimony by FBI agents on the sadistic and sickening practices carried out at Guantánamo.

In one section, the report states: "[An FBI Agent] recalled that, at some point during the interrogation, the military officer 'put water down' a seated detainee's throat. He said he guessed that the purpose of the water was to give the detainee the sensation that he was drowning, so that he would provide the information that the interrogator wanted. [The agent] stated that the detainee was gagging and spitting out water. He said that the detainee appeared to be

uncomfortable, and assumed that he had trouble breathing."

Consider the account of the interrogation of Mohamedou Ould Slahi, a Mauritanian national who was arrested by his own government, turned over to US forces and brought to Guantánamo in 2002:

"He was left alone in a cold room known as 'the freezer,' where guards would prevent him from sleeping by putting ice or cold water on him...

"He was subjected to sleep deprivation for a period of 70 days by means of prolonged interrogations, strobe lights, threatening music, forced intake of water, and forced standing.

"He was deprived of clothing by a female interrogator;

"Two female interrogators touched him sexually and made sexual statements to him;

"Prior to and during the boat ride incident, he was severely beaten."

In addition, the document says, he was "led to believe he was going to be executed, and urinated on himself," and was told that his mother and family would be detained and harmed.

Similar episodes were described, according to the IG report, by literally hundreds of FBI agents, who witnessed CIA, military and private contractor interrogators carry out illegal acts of torture and abuse against detainees.

In addition, the report cites: several agents who reported instances of beatings, 30 agents who reported witnessing prolonged shackling of detainees in stress positions, 70 agents who reported detainees being subjected to sleep deprivation, 29 agents who had information on the use of extreme temperatures in order to "break the detainees' resolve to resist cooperating" and 50 agents reporting the use of extended isolation to "wear down a detainee's resistance."

In addition, four agents reported the kicking and beating to death of two detainees in Afghanistan who had been subjected to prolonged shackling in a standing position.

The episodes of torture detailed in this report are the tip of the iceberg.

They do not include the treatment of Murat Kurnaz, a Turkish citizen born in Germany, who was arrested during a trip to Pakistan in the fall of 2001 and was handed over to US officials for a \$3,000 bounty. First taken to the US base in Kandahar, Afghanistan, he was then transferred to Guantánamo. While by 2002 the US authorities concluded that Kurnaz had nothing to do with terrorism, he was imprisoned until the middle of 2006 and released only because of pressure from the German government.

Barred from entry to the US, he testified via video link to a sparsely attended hearing of the House Foreign Affairs Committee this week.

"I did nothing wrong and I was treated like a monster," he said. He

told how he was subjected to electric shocks, being suspended by his wrists for hours and subjected to the ‘water treatment,’ in which his head was stuck into a bucket of water and he was punched in the stomach, forcing him to inhale the liquid. (The Justice Department Inspector General’s report, it bears noting, affirmed that this last form of torture did not constitute “waterboarding,” but did represent “an effort to intimidate the detainees and increase their feelings of helplessness.”)

“I know others have died from this kind of treatment,” said Kurnaz. “I suffered from sleep deprivation, solitary confinement, religious and sexual humiliations. I was beaten multiple times.”

“There was no law in Guantánamo,” Kurnaz concluded. “I didn’t think this could happen in the 21st century... I could never have imagined that this place was created by the United States.”

The inmates held at Guantánamo represent barely 1 percent of those detained at US prison camps and secret jails run by the military and the CIA in Iraq, Afghanistan and other points around the world. An estimated 27,000 people are being held without charges, much less trials, many of them simply having disappeared into Washington’s global gulag. Some are held on prison ships, others in secret dungeons run jointly by the CIA and regimes to which it “outsources” detainees, like Egypt, Jordan and Morocco, where other, cruder forms of torture—being buried alive, given electric shocks or slashed with scalpels—are employed.

The report also reconfirms that the revolting scenes captured in the photographs taken at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq that came to light four years ago—naked and hooded men being subjected to torture and sexual humiliation by US guards—were no aberration. The methods described in the report—forced nudity, the use of attack dogs in interrogations, chaining detainees in “stress” positions, leading them around on dog leashes, draping them in women’s underwear—were identical to those officially blamed on a “few bad apples” at Abu Ghraib.

The uniformity of abuse at these widely separated facilities is evidence that the psychopathic and criminal sadism inflicted upon those detained by US forces was planned and orchestrated from the top.

Indeed, as ABC News revealed last month, top administration officials on the so-called Principals’ Committee—Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Colin Powell, CIA Director George Tenet, Attorney General John Ashcroft and National Security Council Adviser Condoleezza Rice—conducted detailed discussions on “enhanced interrogation techniques,” which, according to ABC, “were almost choreographed—down to the number of times CIA agents could use a specific tactic.”

Bush subsequently told ABC that he was “aware our national security team met on this issue. And I approved.”

The report establishes that FBI and Justice Department officials advised the White House National Security Council of their concern that the practices witnessed by the agents were “gravely damaging ... the rule of law” at Guantánamo.

In the end, however, they were told to back off, and they complied, thereby becoming accomplices in this criminality and its cover-up.

The revelations in the FBI report have provoked no significant protests or demands for action from the Democrats in Congress, or for that matter from the party’s presidential contenders, Senators Barack Obama and Hillary Clinton, neither of whom have made torture an issue in their campaigns.

The *New York Times* Tuesday carried a lead editorial titled, “What

the FBI agents saw,” which laid out the details of the report and stated that it “shows what happens when an American president, his secretary of defense, his Justice Department and other top officials corrupt American law to rationalize and authorize the abuse, humiliation and torture of prisoners.”

The paper’s conclusion: “The Democrats must press for full disclosure” through hearings to uncover “the extent of President Bush’s disregard for the law and the Geneva Conventions.” This, they tell their readers, “is the only way to get this country back to being a defender, not a violator, of human rights.”

Such is the impotence of erstwhile American establishment liberalism. The extent of the Bush administration’s outright criminality has been thoroughly exposed over the course of several years.

The wholesale and deliberate violations of the Geneva Conventions and the Convention against Torture are, under international law, war crimes—just as the FBI recognized they were. What is demanded is not another toothless congressional hearing, but rather the constitution of a war crimes tribunal. Those responsible must be held accountable.

Bush, Cheney, Rice, Rumsfeld, Powell, Tenet and Ashcroft should be placed on trial. Those like former White House counsel and Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, Cheney’s chief of staff David Addington and Justice Department deputy assistant secretary John Yoo, who crafted the pseudo-legal arguments legitimizing torture, should be prosecuted as well, together with those military and intelligence officials who directed the criminal practices at Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib, Bagram and other CIA and military camps and prisons.

The Democratic leadership has no desire or intention to fight for such a reckoning. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and other party leaders have repeatedly insisted that impeachment of the president and vice president is “off the table.” They have no interest in pursuing the administration on the issue of torture because they themselves are complicit, with Pelosi and other senior congressional Democrats having been briefed extensively on the criminal methods employed at Guantánamo, which they approved and concealed from the American people.

On a more fundamental level, the Democrats have been complicit in a policy of global militarism and aggression—carried out under the mantle of a “global war on terrorism”—which is directed at using armed force to further the interests of America’s ruling oligarchy. It is this criminal strategy—resulting in the loss of over 1 million Iraqi lives—that has given rise to the crime of torture itself.

Nonetheless, the deepening crisis of American capitalism is creating the conditions for profound shocks and changes in political and social relations that may well result in Bush, Cheney and Co. standing in the dock as war criminals.

Such a trial is vitally necessary from the standpoint of halting these ongoing crimes, preventing the use of similar methods against political opposition within the US itself and politically educating the American people.



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