

Torture photos: US soldiers raped, sodomized Iraqi prisoners

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29 May 2009

In an interview with the British newspaper the *Daily Telegraph* published Wednesday, former US General Antonio Taguba said that photographs the Obama administration is seeking to suppress show images of US soldiers raping and sodomizing Iraqi prisoners. Taguba, who conducted the military inquiry of prisoner abuse at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison in 2004 after some photos of US soldiers torturing prisoners became public, said that among the photos are images of soldiers raping a female prisoner, raping a male detainee, and committing “sexual assaults on prisoners with objects including a truncheon, wire and phosphorescent tube,” according to the *Telegraph*.

Gen. Taguba said even the description of the photos is explosive. “These pictures show torture, abuse, rape and every indecency,” Taguba said. “The mere description of these pictures is horrendous enough, take my word for it.”

Taguba’s revelations expose the deceit of President Barack Obama’s claim, used to justify the photos’ suppression, that they “are not particularly sensational, especially when compared to the painful images that we remember from Abu Ghraib.” In all, it is believed that there are some 2,000 photographs depicting about 400 cases of US military personnel torturing Iraqis and Afghans at seven military prisons. The Bush administration, and now Obama, have sought to block publication of the images.

Obama also claimed that “the most direct consequence of releasing them...would be to inflame anti-American public opinion and to put our troops in greater danger.” While this may likely be true, the criminal nature of the US occupation of Iraq and Afghanistan is already well known by the nations’ populations, who have died and been made refugees in the hundreds of thousands since being invaded in 2003 and 2001, respectively. Indeed, this claim only exposes the true nature of the US occupations: they have never been about establishing democracy, but aimed at stamping out resistance to US control of the strategically important nations through mass bloodletting and terror, the historical *modus operandi* of every imperialist occupying power.

However, the central reason Obama has chosen to fight the photos’ release is that top US generals announced their opposition to their publication. The generals’ intervention came in the midst of increasingly open dissension from the ranks of the military-intelligence apparatus over Obama’s handling of “the war on terror.” After Obama released four Bush administration legal memos justifying torture, a campaign, spearheaded by Bush Vice President Dick Cheney, was launched, appealing to the military brass and spies. Obama responded by promising he would block any investigation of the previous administration’s carefully crafted and controlled torture policies. He then reversed an earlier decision to not appeal a judge’s ruling in response to an American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) freedom of information lawsuit launched in 2004, which demanded the release of dozens of the torture photos.

An Obama Pentagon spokesman denied that the suppressed images depict rape, while a carefully worded statement seemed to indicate other photos depict precisely such actions. Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman said the *Telegraph* “has completely mischaracterized the images.... None of the photos in question depict the images that are described in that article.” Whitman did not specifically deny Taguba’s claims.

Obama claims that the torture depicted in the photographs was committed by “a small number of individuals,” and that those “involved have been identified, and appropriate actions have been taken.” Here we may safely assume Obama is referring to a small handful of rank-and-file soldiers.

But what of the high-ranking officers who oversaw, endorsed and most likely ordered the torture and rape of prisoners? If there are 2,000 photographs of prisoner torture that fell under the control of the Pentagon, how many more cases were not photographed? It is clear that the torture and rape of prisoners went far beyond the actions of “a few bad apples.” This torture and sexual humiliation of prisoners—up to and including rape—can only be described as the systematic policy of the US military and Central Intelligence

Agency (CIA), sanctioned at the highest levels of government. Indeed, the generals' opposition to further publication of the photos is likely based in part on their own association with the crimes.

The policy of torture came from higher still, however, as recently released Justice Department legal memos and other evidence show. Various forms of torture, including forced nudity and sexual humiliation were studied, justified, and individually approved by top White House and congressional officials. A US Senate Armed Services Committee report issued in April reveals that Bush Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld personally approved 15 "harsh interrogation" methods. A version of Rumsfeld's document was used, verbatim, at Abu Ghraib, according to the report. (See "Bush, top cabinet officials monitored torture of detainees")

In his *Telegraph* interview, Taguba solidarized himself with Obama's decision to suppress the photos. Taguba's own investigation in 2004 was in fact a partial cover-up. He later admitted that he was ordered to confine his investigation to low-ranking military police, although he was aware that high-ranking generals had "extensive knowledge" of the torture. And though he was aware of the photographic evidence of torture and rape at the time, Taguba's report made no mention of them.

Because his report was not a total whitewash, however, the Bush administration forced the major general into retirement in 2007. He has since described the actions of the Bush administration in Iraq as war crimes. "There is no longer any doubt that the current administration committed war crimes," Taguba wrote in the forward for a report by Physicians for Human Rights. "The only question is whether those who ordered torture will be held to account."

The photographic evidence of rape substantiates evidence Taguba gathered in his investigation, which only became public due to another freedom of information lawsuit. For example, in a sworn deposition Kasim Mehaddi Hilas said he witnessed US military personnel raping a boy. "I saw [a US military translator rape] a kid, his age would be about 15 to 18 years. The kid was hurting very bad and they covered all the doors with sheets. Then when I heard screaming I climbed the door because on top it wasn't covered and I saw [the soldier] who was wearing the military uniform, putting his **** in the little kid's **** and the female soldier was taking pictures."

The sworn deposition also described the anal rape of prisoners with phosphorescent tubes and police clubs, as well as the use of wire in sexual torture.

The rape of Iraqi boys by US military personnel is corroborated by other evidence. Journalist Seymour Hersh, who played a critical role in breaking the Abu Ghraib story

in 2004, has evidently seen all of the photos, and is aware of video footage depicting rape. He has not written publicly on their content, but a 2004 speech he gave to the ACLU indicates the sheer horror of the US military's methods:

"Some of the worst things that happened you don't know about, okay?" Hersh said. "The women were passing messages out saying, 'Please come and kill me, because of what's happened,' and basically what happened is that those women who were arrested with young boys, children in cases that have been recorded. The boys were sodomized with the cameras rolling. And the worst, above all, of that is the soundtrack of the boys shrieking that your government has. They are in total terror. It's going to come out." In another speech, quoted by Rick Pearlstein, Hersh spoke of "horrible things done to children of women prisoners, as the cameras run."

The unfathomable crimes depicted in the photos arise inexorably from the project of aggressive wars based on lies. As such, they are the flip side of the conspiracy against the democratic rights of the American people. Both arise from the deepening crisis of US capitalism, which the ruling elite seeks to offset by seizing hold of key resources and strategic advantage over its rivals.

One can only react with horror. Contained in the stories and images of the torture of defenseless prisoners, some of them boys and women, is the true face of US imperialism, which finds no crime beneath its dignity in its effort to subjugate Iraq and Afghanistan. Just as the Vietnam War conjures up images of napalmed children fleeing US soldiers, and Nazi Germany invokes images of emaciated prisoners near death, the images of sexual torture will forever be associated with the American "war on terror."

In acting to suppress the images and protect the torturers, Obama has made himself an accomplice in these crimes. Moreover, in the absence of criminal investigation, there is every reason to believe that similar crimes continue in Iraq and Afghanistan today.

Indeed, the American ruling class is now engaged in an acrimonious debate over whether or not to openly embrace torture and other illegal aspects of the war on terror—the position advocated by Cheney—or to construct a quasi-legal framework within which similar policies can be carried forward—the position advocated by Obama.



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