

Donald Rumsfeld publishes memoirs of an unrepentant war criminal

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The publication of the memoirs of an individual who was for decades so intimately involved in the predations of US imperialism as Donald Rumsfeld, who served as defense secretary under both George W. Bush (2001-2006) and Gerald Ford (1975-1977), is of major interest. The book, *Known and Unknown*, should be read closely against the bloody record of US policies all over the world, for which Rumsfeld's name will forever be linked: torture, extrajudicial assassinations, disappearances, "extraordinary rendition," and, especially, the illegal invasion of Iraq under false pretexts.

This has not been the intention of the recent media attention focused on Rumsfeld, who, when he left office in 2006, was arguably the most despised cabinet secretary in US history. The aim is instead to whitewash his crimes.

Such an effort has definite purposes. As Rumsfeld himself explained in a Tuesday interview with Diane Sawyer of ABC News, the same policies continue today under the Obama administration and will be carried on for years to come.

"For all the criticism of President Bush and the people working around him for the things he put in place—the Patriot Act, the Guantanamo Bay [prison] and various things, military commissions—you know, a lot of people criticized them and they fussed at it," Rumsfeld said. "The fact is, they're still there. Why are they still there? They're there, because they make sense in the 21st Century. They're needed. And the new administration has not been able to figure out a better way to do it."

Rumsfeld bears enormous personal responsibility for the act that set the US government on a descent into lawlessness and barbarity that continues today: the invasion of Iraq. As was established at the Nuremberg trials of Nazi leaders in the wake of World War II, the war crime of war crimes, from which all others flow, is the unprovoked invasion of other nations. Sawyer's studied

effort to evade this central issue is another measure of the US media's corruption and complicity.

There is overwhelming evidence that Rumsfeld, together with Vice President Dick Cheney, President George Bush, and other top officials, beginning the day of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, actively falsified information in a bid to justify the invasion of Iraq. In the lead-up to the invasion, Rumsfeld infamously declared, "we know where they are," referring to the weapons of mass destruction claim that served as the ultimate *casus belli*.

Sawyer, who began her career as an aide to Richard Nixon and now earns an estimated \$12 to \$15 million a year as a talking head, had no interest in confronting Rumsfeld with any of this. She allowed him to act as if the failure to find "weapons of mass destruction" in Iraq was some sort of innocent mistake.

The only hint of criticism Sawyer served up came from the right, when she suggested that his decision to not send a much larger occupation force into Iraq might have "cost lives."

On Tuesday morning, Rumsfeld was interviewed live by ABC's George Stephanopoulos. Stephanopoulos, while assuming a more critical posture, followed the same right-wing tack as Sawyer, chastising Rumsfeld for opposing the "troop surge" in Iraq that the American ruling class credits for pacifying the country.

Stephanopoulos asked what degree of responsibility his failure to send more US soldiers had in the deaths of "115,000" Iraqis. The question is dishonest on two counts. In the first place, it falsely suggests that the US military was a source of peace in Iraq, and that had there only been more "boots on the ground," violence would have been less. In fact, the US military destroyed Iraqi society, one of the most advanced in the Arab world.

Second, the most credible scientific survey—published in the leading British medical journal, *The Lancet*—found

that upwards of 1 million Iraqis had died as a result of the US invasion, 10 times the figure posited by Stephanopoulos.

Rumsfeld expressed regret neither for the mass death inflicted upon Iraqis nor for the 4,436 US soldiers killed in the invasion and occupation.

In her interview, Sawyer encouraged Rumsfeld to defend torture, lobbing softball questions about whether, in his opinion, the intelligence gathered through “enhanced interrogation techniques” had been worth the bad press.

In response, Rumsfeld specifically defended the torture of Mohammed al-Qahtani, who was accused of participating in the September 11 terrorist plot. “Qahtani, who was the 20th hijacker, they say—he gave a lot of information,” Rumsfeld said. “And it was very helpful to our interrogators and to the United States government in saving lives.... And I think that the fact that we haven’t had an attack in a decade is a credit to that administration, the Bush administration, and to [President Bush].”

Though defending “harsh methods,” Rumsfeld claims to have been “troubled and surprised” by the more brutal aspects of the Guantanamo Bay abuse of al-Qahtani, whose sexual humiliation, extreme isolation, and sleep deprivation nearly killed him and destroyed his ability to reason.

While admitting al-Qahtani was subjected to torture, Rumsfeld attempted to distance himself from its application at the notorious Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, where photos escaped Pentagon censorship showing US military personnel physically and sexually abusing prisoners, including posing with the bodies of murdered inmates. Rumsfeld expressed no remorse over the treatment of the prisoners, calling the revelations only a “damaging distraction.”

Rumsfeld, along with Bush, bears responsibility for what took place at Abu Ghraib. Former US Army Brigadier General Janis Karpinski, who was in charge of Abu Ghraib when the torture photographs were leaked, said that Rumsfeld personally ordered a series of abuses outlawed by the Geneva Convention. In 2004, *The Economist* published a note from Rumsfeld demanding that prisoners be made to stand for long periods of time, with a hand-written addendum reading, “make sure this is accomplished.”

Sawyer did not challenge Rumsfeld on any of this, nor did she mention one of the grisliest crimes of the US “war on terror,” the Dasht-i-Leili massacre in Afghanistan, when as many as 3,000 prisoners under the control of US

military personnel and Afghan warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum were suffocated to death while in metal transport boxes in the desert. The prisoners had been part of an uprising days earlier at the Mazar-i-Sharif jail in November 2001. Under Rumsfeld, the Pentagon sought to obstruct any investigation of this heinous crime.

Rumsfeld’s media offensive defending torture and wars of aggression follows that of Bush himself, who in November released his memoirs, *Decision Points*.

While torture, prison camps, and assassinations are the consensus policies of the American ruling class—as made clear by their perpetuation under the Obama administration—those who put these policies in place are hated the world over.

Last week, it came to light that Bush abruptly canceled a trip to Switzerland, where he was scheduled to address a pro-Israeli group. The most likely reason is that he would have faced criminal charges and a war crimes investigation during his visit, the result of his acknowledgement in *Decision Points* that he ordered waterboarding, a form of torture that brings its victims close to death by drowning.

Amnesty International said that an investigation of Bush “would be mandatory under Switzerland’s international obligations if President Bush entered the country,” and Gavin Sullivan, a lawyer seeking Bush’s prosecution as a war criminal, said, “Bush enjoys no immunity from prosecution. As head of state he authorized and condoned acts of torture, and the law is clear—where a person has been responsible for torture, all states have an obligation under international law to open an investigation and prosecute.”

The same holds true with Rumsfeld. While unable to leave the country, both men are as yet secure within the borders of the United States, because the Obama administration refuses to comply with this “obligation under international law” and is continuing and deepening the crimes begun under its predecessor.



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