

# White House, US media stonewall on Guantanamo

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The thousands of pages of documents on US prisoners at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, released by WikiLeaks Sunday night, demonstrate the lawless character of the US government, both under George W. Bush and Barack Obama. Kidnapping, torture, illegal imprisonment, subornation of perjury, defiance of international law—these are only a few of the crimes of which the top officials of the US government are demonstrably guilty.

Then secretary of defense Donald Rumsfeld branded the Guantanamo detainees the “worst of the worst,” telling the American public that the prisoners were all hard-core terrorists, many of them linked to the 9/11 attacks in New York City and Washington. The WikiLeaks documents demonstrate that the statements of Rumsfeld, Cheney and other top Bush aides were deliberate and conscious lies.

The vast majority of the 800 Guantanamo prisoners were innocent men swept up randomly on the battlefield in Afghanistan or seized by allied intelligence agencies, particularly in Pakistan, where anyone of Arab or Afghan descent was a potential cash bonanza for corrupt police officials seeking to collect American bounties. More than 100 suffered from mental illness when they were seized. Others were driven into that state by years of isolation and abuse, without any hope of release or legal recourse.

Hina Shamsi, director of the National Security Project for the American Civil Liberties Union, said in a statement: “These documents are remarkable because they show just how questionable the government’s basis has been for detaining hundreds of people, in some cases indefinitely, at Guantanamo. The one-sided assessments are rife with uncorroborated evidence, information obtained through torture, speculation, errors and allegations that have been proven false.”

The response by the Obama administration and the corporate-controlled American media has been to dismiss the latest WikiLeaks revelations of American government crimes. A Pentagon spokeswoman said the military would not comment on the documents because they “are the stolen property of the US government. The documents are classified and do not become declassified due to an unauthorized disclosure.”

White House Press Secretary Jay Carney condemned the release of classified information by WikiLeaks, adding, “We think it’s unfortunate that the *New York Times* and other news organizations have made the decision to publish numerous documents obtained illegally concerning the detention facility at Guantanamo Bay.”

He reiterated that administration was “committed to ... working towards the ultimate closure of the detention facility,” one of Obama’s most notoriously broken promises, and went on to claim as Obama’s co-thinkers on Guantanamo “the previous president, George W. Bush, John McCain when he was a candidate, [and the] uniformed military leadership.”

This declaration of continuity between the policies of Bush and Obama is of utmost importance. It demonstrates the repudiation of basic democratic rights by American imperialism, under presidents of both the big business parties. Obama has not only kept Guantanamo open, he has embraced the use of military commissions to give drumhead trials to selected prisoners, as well as the indefinite—effectively lifetime—detention without trial of an even larger number of men, an action which is in flagrant violation of both international law and the US Constitution.

The response of the American media to the Guantanamo documents is a combination of silence and deliberate diversion. There was considerable media

attention Monday, as the documents first became available, but by Monday night, the story was being downplayed on the network television news. By Tuesday night, it had largely disappeared.

The diversion was spearheaded by the *Times*, which set the tone for much of the subsequent coverage by focusing attention on the claim that one-quarter of those released from Guantanamo over the last nine years, about 150 out of 800, had “returned” to terrorist activities.

Following suit, the *Washington Post* published a report Tuesday suggesting that there was now a “debate” over “familiar questions: Were too many innocent men incarcerated there over the past decade? Or did US officials ultimately free too many dangerous detainees? Advocates on both sides of the debate have new evidence to cite in the documents ...”

Even if the claim of 150 former Guantanamo prisoners “returning” to terrorism were true, it would not alter the overriding fact that the Bush administration established, and the Obama administration maintained, a concentration camp outside the law. And the claim is manifestly false, since the Pentagon figure includes in its count of “terrorists” all the former prisoners who are now engaged in efforts to expose or condemn the Guantanamo prison and other US crimes in the “war on terror.”

The actual number of former prisoners who have joined Al Qaeda is a tiny fraction of the 150, and even these include some who became radicalized by their experience at Guantanamo and were recruited to the Islamic fundamentalist group as a result of, and not before, their detention and torture by the US government.

These facts are blithely ignored in the *New York Times* editorial published Tuesday on “The Guantanamo Papers.” The newspaper seeks to distinguish between “the legal and moral disaster that President George W. Bush created there,” and the policies now pursued by President Obama.

Obama gets a clean bill of health, according to the *Times*: “The torture has stopped. The inmates’ cases have been reviewed. But the detention camp in Cuba remains a festering sore on this country’s global reputation. Hampered by ideologues and cowards in Congress, President Obama has made scant progress in healing it.”

Actually, the torture is ongoing. Indefinite detention without prospect of either a judicial hearing or eventual release is itself a form of torture. So are the constant interrogations to which many of the prisoners are still subjected, although some of them are more than nine years removed from any association with Al Qaeda, and therefore can hardly be encompassed by the “ticking time bomb” scenario invariably cited as justification for their treatment.

The detention camp at Guantanamo should be closed immediately, and all those jailed there released or tried through a civilian judicial process in which basic democratic rights and constitutional norms are observed in full. Those US government officials, both civilian and military, who are responsible for the creation and continuation of this concentration camp should themselves be held to account before an international tribunal.

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