

# UN report documents systematic torture of Afghan detainees

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A report released Monday by the United Nations documents what it calls "systematic" torture at Afghan government prisons of suspected insurgents captured by US, NATO and Afghan authorities.

Based on interviews with 379 randomly selected prisoners conducted between October 2010 and August 2011, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) document describes savage and sadistic treatment of nearly half of those who were interrogated by the Afghan intelligence agency, the National Directorate of Security (NDS), and a third of those who were held by the Afghanistan National Police (ANP). Both agencies are funded and trained by the United States.

The 74-page report includes accounts of torture from 15 detainees. It states: "Detainees described experiencing torture in the form of suspension (being hung by the wrists from chains or other devices attached to the wall, ceiling, iron bars or other fixtures for lengthy periods) and beatings, especially with rubber hoses, electric cables or wires or wooden sticks and most frequently on the soles of the feet.

"Electric shock, twisting and wrenching of detainees' genitals, stress positions including forced standing, removal of toenails and threatened sexual abuse were among other forms of torture that detainees reported."

Noting that "the practices documented meet the international definition of torture," the UN points out that 324 of the detainees it interviewed were imprisoned for alleged ties to the Taliban or other insurgent groups, and that of these, 89 had been transferred to the Afghan intelligence service or the police by US or other occupation forces.

In 22 of these cases, the men were tortured while in Afghan custody. The report points out that the United Nations Convention Against Torture bars the transfer of detained persons to the custody of another state where

there are substantial grounds for believing they are at risk of torture.

Nevertheless, the UN makes no allegations of complicity by the US or other nations participating in the occupation of Afghanistan and attempts to exonerate the American puppet government of President Hamid Karzai. Even as it reports that torture occurred in 47 facilities across 24 of the country's 34 provinces, the UN declares that it is not "institutional or government policy" and praises the regime for cooperating in its investigation.

This cannot alter the fact that the revelations contained in the report constitute a devastating indictment of the US-led war and occupation and make clear their imperialist and colonialist character. The practices described are war crimes, part of a systematic effort directed by Washington to terrorize and intimidate the Afghan people and drown the popular resistance to foreign occupation in blood.

UNAMA found that those tortured by the NDS included children who were under 18 years of age when detained. It documented one death from torture--a detainee in ANP and NDS custody in Kandahar in April 2011.

The report says the torture was typically carried out in order to extract confessions and information from suspected insurgents. At an NDS facility in Kandahar, one detainee reported he was threatened with having a stick with chili powder shoved up his rectum.

The most brutal of the facilities, according to the UN, was the NDS site in Kabul known as Department 90. One detainee described how NDS officers in Department 90 intensified the torture the longer he refused to confess to connections to the Taliban. "They took off my clothes, and one of them held my penis in his hand and twisted it severely until I passed out," said the man. "After I woke up, I had to confess because I could not stand the pain, and I did not want that to happen to me again and suffer the same severe and unbearable pain."

Another told the UN interviewers: "When they took me

to [Department 90], I did not know where I had been taken... After two days, I learned that I was in 90 from my cellmates. There is so much beating at 90 that people call it Hell.”

The fact that the worst abuse occurred at the facility in the nation’s capital and center of both the Karzai regime and the American occupation command makes all the more absurd the attempts to distance the puppet government and its American masters from the crimes detailed in the UN report.

With the collaboration of the UN, the Karzai government, the US and NATO have been engaged in an effort at damage control in anticipation of Monday’s release of the torture report. After being given a draft of the report in September, Gen. John R. Allen, the NATO commander in Afghanistan, suspended transfers of suspected insurgents to 16 of the facilities identified as sites where torture routinely took place.

In its article on the UN report Tuesday, the *New York Times*, an avid supporter of the war and President Obama’s escalation of it, attempted to insulate the US government, writing merely of its “potential complicity” and stressing the remedial actions supposedly taken by the occupation forces and the Afghan government.

Of General Allen, the *Times* wrote: “He has since initiated a plan to investigate the sites, provide training in modern interrogation techniques and monitor the Afghan government’s practices. The American Embassy is now heavily involved in devising a long-term monitoring program for Afghan detention sites, American officials said.

“In a statement, NATO officials said they were working with the United Nations and the Afghan government to ‘improve detention operations’ and ‘establish safeguards.’”

The newspaper quoted uncritically an unnamed American official who sought to alibi for Washington, declaring: “I know of no one who knew of these alleged abuses as they were happening... Thus, it’s impossible to know if there was any information passed on that came in some form from these alleged incidents.”

For its part, the Karzai regime has denied the worst of the UN allegations, admitting only to “deficiencies.”

The article makes clear that the overriding concern of the *Times* is not the horrors being inflicted on the Afghan population, but the potential for the UN revelations to complicate the plans of US imperialism to draw down its troops in Afghanistan—even while maintaining a substantial and permanent military force—and turn over

the job of policing the population and repressing the anti-occupation resistance to the US-trained Afghan military and security forces.

The *Times* notes that the UN report could jeopardize US financing of the Afghan police and intelligence forces. It cites a US law barring both the State Department and the Defense Department from providing financial assistance or training to any unit of the security forces of a country where there is credible evidence of gross human rights abuses. It adds, however, that “financing can go forward to other units not involved and even to the offending units if serious remedial actions are taken,” which goes far in explaining the elaborate gestures toward reforming the Afghan national police and NDS.

Both the US government and the *New York Times* proceed as though the American and international public suffer from collective amnesia and have no recollection of the systematic torture by the US exposed in places such as Abu Ghraib, Iraq; Guantanamo, Cuba; and Bagram, Afghanistan. In fact, all of the torture techniques detailed in the UN report on Afghanistan have been employed—and continue to be employed—by the US at these and other sites around the world.

In Monday’s article, the *Times* maintains a discreet and cynical silence about its own exposé of US torture at the US base in Bagram published in May of 2005, after the newspaper obtained a 2,000-page US Army report concerning the 2002 killing of two unarmed civilian Afghan prisoners by US troops at the base.

In an accompanying editorial at the time, the *Times* wrote: “The investigative file on Bagram, obtained by the *Times*, showed that the mistreatment of prisoners was routine: shackling them to the ceilings of their cells, depriving them of sleep, kicking and hitting them, sexually humiliating them and threatening them with guard dogs—the very same behavior later repeated in Iraq.”



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