

A Change Ain't Gonna Come: Democrats Openly Embrace Aggression and Torture

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It was a remarkable display even by [the hideous standards that the Democrats have already set for themselves](#). Over the past week, the party's leaders have put forward not one but two architects of Bush Regime war crimes as standard-bearers for Democratic policies and principles. In so doing, they have aligned themselves as completely and publicly as possible with the Hitlerian war crime of military aggression in Iraq and the Stalinist filth of deliberate, calculated and brutal torture, as exemplified by (but in no way limited to) the sickening atrocities at Abu Ghraib.

First, the party leadership [picked retired General Ricardo Sanchez to give the Democratic response](#) to the president's weekly radio address last Saturday. Then, just three days later, frontrunning presidential candidate [Hillary Clinton singled out Colin Powell](#) as one of the personal emissaries she would send out to tell the world that "bipartisan foreign policy is back."

But as these incidents display so nakedly, "bipartisan foreign policy" has never gone away. It has continued to operate smoothly at the highest levels throughout the Bush imperium, greased by the blood money flowing to both parties from the spoils of war (H. Clinton now receives more legalized bribery from military-related industries than any of the Republican candidates), and by their shared vision of armed American hegemony over world affairs. (The latter is [well-limned by Arthur Silber here](#).)

As Amy Goodman notes at Alternet, Sanchez was neck-deep in the blood-flecked slime where Pentagon brass and White House officials devised the torture regimens that were briefly exposed at Abu Ghraib. In addition to urging his troops to "go to the outer limits" in extracting information from the thousands of Iraqis they were sweeping up at random, and ordering prison officials to violate the Geneva Conventions by hiding designated prisoners from the Red Cross, Sanchez gave "detailed orders" for the infliction of carefully calibrated tortures used by CIA-trained, Reagan-backed Latin American tyrannies and death squads in the 1980s. As Alfred McCoy told Goodman:

In September of 2003, General Sanchez issued orders, detailed orders, for expanded interrogation techniques beyond those allowed in the US Army Field Manual 3452, and if you look at those techniques, what he's ordering, in essence, is a combination of self-inflicted pain, stress positions and sensory disorientation. And if you look at the 1963 CIA KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation Manual, you look at the 1983 CIA Interrogation Training Manual that they used in Honduras for training Honduran officers in torture and interrogation, and then twenty years later, you look at General Sanchez's 2003 orders, there's a striking continuity across this forty-year span in both the general principles: this

total assault on the existential platforms of human identity and existence, OK, and the specific techniques, the way of achieving that, through the attack on these sensory receptors.

There is much more in [Goodman's excellent piece](#), which should be read in full.

As for Colin Powell, the idea that this knowing conspirator in deceitful warmongering and criminal war-waging could “represent our country well” speaks volumes about Clinton’s vision of what America is really all about. [As we noted here before](#):

Powell’s reputation as “one of the good guys” in the Bush Administration has been one of the most enduring mysteries of our sad, demented times. He was not only one of the chief enablers of Bush’s war crime in Iraq, but [his entire career has marked him out as a bagman for a bloody elite](#), ever willing to turn a blind eye — or to pitch in directly — when there is dirty work to be done, from the My Lai massacre to Iran-Contra to the murderous excursion in Panama to the warm embrace of Saddam Hussein to Powell’s final apotheosis as Imperial Handmaiden in his sick-making appearance at the UN in February 2003, when he “made the case” for war. (For more, see [Jon Schwarz's detailed look at Powell's deliberate deceits](#), and [this history of the handmaiden](#) from the incomparable Robert Parry.)

But of course, this dismal record is precisely what makes him a “distinguished American” in Clinton’s eyes: he knows how to serve the powerful, and how to give their ugly lusts for loot and dominion a more pleasing outer appearance.

What is perhaps most remarkable about all of this is that none of it is regarded as remarkable by the molders and mouthers of public opinion in the echo chamber of the political-media world. Should it not be scandalous for an “opposition” candidate – one nominally opposed to a disastrous war – to embrace a man who by all rights should be on trial for his key role in creating that disaster? Should it not be scandalous for an “opposition” party – one nominally opposed to the Administration’s “lawlessness” – to embrace a man who by all rights should be on trial for his complicity in torture and atrocity?

But it is not scandalous – because the bipartisan American Establishment does not consider aggressive war, lawlessness and torture to be scandalous, as long as these crimes advance the interests – and flatter the prejudices and self-regard – of the elite. And if you wish to belong to this elite, to reap the rich bounty of such an inclusion, then you must embrace those who commit the crimes that maintain you in your marvelous privilege. You must accept whatever means are necessary to perpetuate the system that undergirds your lofty position.

To be sure, there will be quibbles over tactics, over points of emphasis, over specific policies, and whether or not they best serve the system; this happens under every form of government, even the most totalitarian. But the presence of politics in any given system has nothing to do with its moral content. And as we have seen this week, to play in the big leagues in the American system, you must openly signify your approval of aggressive war, deceit and torture. You must dip your hands in blood. And that is exactly what Hillary Clinton and the Democratic leadership have done — yet again — in the last week.

(For more on just what H. Clinton and the Democrats are supporting, see [“Eyes Wide Open,”](#) and Rich Kastelein’s indispensable [War Gallery](#).)

UPDATE: Jon Schwarz [has more on this theme](#), with a look at Lee Feinstein, the man who will most likely be Clinton's national security adviser if she is elected. Do read the whole thing, but here's an apt passage that Jon found in a NY Daily News story:

Another Foreign Affairs essay, co-written in 2004 by Feinstein, is also drawing scrutiny. It argues Bush's controversial doctrine of "preemptive" war - attacking an enemy before it attacks the U.S. - "does not go far enough."

Feinstein, a former Defense and State department official, supported ousting Saddam in 2003 and believed Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. Since then he has championed the concept of a "duty to prevent," which justifies preemptive strikes. He said the U.S. should try to build coalitions, but that it can attack without allies' support.

Don't say we didn't warn you

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