

A Tradition of Dehumanizing: The CIA's Psycho-War and Torture Schemes in The Philippines

Extrajudicial killings, beatings, mental torture, abductions

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The United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) occupies center-stage again in the Philippines, the laboratory in 1950-1960s for the Phoenix assassination program in Vietnam inspired by CIA agent Edward Lansdale who is credited for defeating the communist-led Huk uprising. Attention is being given to the CIA systematization of coercive techniques in handling prisoners, including diverse forms of torture, zealously implemented by the police/military officials of the corrupt, unpopular Gloria Arroyo regime.

Since the Abu Ghraib and the Guantanamo prison scandals, the world public has now become sensitized to the moral/political problem of torture, whether used in peace time or in war. In 1997 The Baltimore Sun first exposed the CIA's training manual applying torture against anti-government subversives in Central America. The manual refers to the 1983 Human Resource Exploitation Training Manual based on the Vietnam-era predecessor called the 1963 "KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation." Interviews of both victims and security agents in Honduras confirmed that kidnapping, surveillance, infiltration of spies, crowd control, torture and murder in the 1980s were committed by the U.S.-supported Honduran, El Salvadoran and Guatemalan military in the war against communism during President Reagan's administration.

The CIA 1983 manual focuses on interrogation methods that, though prohibited by domestic and international law, can be used with approval by higher authority. The manual emphasizes that the questioner "has total control over the subject and his environment." It recommends stripping suspects naked, keeping them blindfolded, and manipulating the "environment to create unpleasant and intolerable situations." Old measures have been refined and geared for psycho-war: depriving prisoners of food and sleep, keeping them in rigid positions, threatening family and loved ones and showing how they are suffering or are in danger, bribery, etc. Why are these effective? Because "the threat to inflict pain may trigger fears more damaging than the immediate sensation of pain." This supplements actual physical pain inflicted in the course of arrest and incarceration.

The thrust of the 1983 CIA torture formula is psychological: 'The pain which is inflicted upon [the detainee] from outside himself may actually intensify his will to resist...but pain which he feels he is inflicting upon himself is more likely to sap his resistance' (Cohn et al, 1997). Hence, the need for the prisoner to maintain rigid positions" etc. in which "the immediate source of pain is not the 'questioner,' but the subject himself." Once a confession is obtained, the pressures are lessened so that this "friendly handling" will induce further

cooperation. What stands out, however, is the emphasis on prolonged solitary confinement and other types of sensory deprivation which generates unbearable stress, anxiety, etc. Hypnosis, drugs, medical, chemical or electrical methods could be used to accelerate acquiescence, with help from psychiatrists, anthropologists/cultural experts, medical personnel, and so on.

The U.S. Senate Intelligence Committee noted in a 1989 memorandum that the early 1963 KUBARK manual used in Vietnam was used in Honduras, with slight tweakings to produce the 1983 version. A Website on "Is there a torture manual?" by Josh Clark states that both manuals coincide in methods of inducing a detainee to volunteer information: "Artificial light, isolation, unfamiliarity and disorientation through solitary confinement and sensory deprivation," sleep deprivation, prolonged stress, electric shocks, etc., are combined with the more sophisticated coercive tactics demonstrated at Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo, and other "rendition" prisons (<http://science.howstuffworks.com/torture-manual.htm>). In *The Shock Doctrine* (2007), noted author Naomi Klein details the academic origin and sociopolitical ramifications of this new paradigm of torture discovered during the Cold War but deployed and finessed by successive U.S. administrations to preserve its violent interventions and hegemonic control in Asia, Latin America and the Middle East. Under the principle of universal jurisdiction, courts in Spain and elsewhere are now planning to try officials of the Bush administration for crimes against humanity, with help from the US Center for Constitutional Rights.

Inventing a Global Conscience

Most informed people today know that in the light of Vietnam and the horrors in Chile, Honduras, Colombia, and other Cold War battlefields, the United Nations has tightened restrictions against torture. The 1985 U.N. Convention Against Torture, ratified by 25 countries (except the U.S.), strengthened the 1950 Geneva Convention prohibiting degradation and humiliation of war prisoners. The UN Convention defines torture as "any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession" (4 Feb. 1985 <http://www.hrweb.org/legal/cat.html>)

The Philippine group KARAPATAN has fully substantiated the Arroyo regime's culpability in violating the UN Convention provisions, as well as the Philippine Constitution's Bill of Rights. The 2007-2009 reports on human rights violations and extrajudicial killings in the Philippines by Philip Alston, U.N. rapporteur for human rights; by Amnesty International and by Human Rights Watch, among others, re-emphasized the need for the Philippine government to conform to United Nations and international law standards. What strikes this author is that since the Marcos dictatorship's unconscionable crimes, followed by the hypocritical promises of reform by Aquino, Ramos, Estrada and Arroyo (the Melo Commission and Task Force Usig), international groups keep repeating the need for government action, when everyone knows that the oligarchic political-economic system and the social classes in control can never deliver justice and guarantee respect for human rights: not one military or police personnel has been convicted for torture, abduction, and extrajudicial killings in the last 40 years (see the various surveys in Buck and Wolf 2008).

The UN, Amnesty International, World Council of Churches, and others keep advising Arroyo to reform. But to no avail, as the treatment of the Morong 43 demonstrates since their detention last February. Forty-two community health workers and doctors were conducting health-skill training seminars in Morong, Rizal, Philippines, sponsored by legal public

organizations when they were arrested at the farmhouse of Dr. Melecia Velmonte, a retired medical professor at the University of the Philippines. They were violently frisked, blindfolded, and held incommunicado in a remote military camp—a prolonged experience of State terrorism predicated on the unproven guilt of the suspects (San Juan 2010).

In March the Philippine Court of Appeals denied their constitutional right of habeas corpus on the basis of a Marcos-era doctrine that such detainees can no longer be released since the AFP/PNP has filed a case in court (that is, the charge of illegal possession of explosives and firearms, planted by the arresting agents). This despite the defective warrant of arrest and the legally flawed inquest proceeding. The Public Interest Law Center and the National Union of Peoples' Lawyers argued that the Court disregarded the litany of the violations of the constitutional rights of the 43 health workers during their unlawful arrest. While you read this, the experience of torture suffered by these 43 persons in the military camp worsens by the hour, 24 hours of every day.

In an incisive critique of the Court's judgment, Prof. Gill Boehringer pointed out that the Court "ignored the illegalities committed in the search, arrest and subsequent proceedings," supposedly "cured" by the filing of criminal charges (Bulatlat 12 April 2010). Two dissenting justices bewailed the toleration of illegal arrests and detention for the sake of a dubious "curative information." In short, the Court favored the AFP/PNP instead of the 43 citizens, despite the illegality of the search and brutal detention process. Justice is on the side of the oligarchic State, not the citizens who are presumed innocent until proven guilty. Hobbes' monstrous Leviathan, comprised here of the ruthless military, police, and the authoritarian Arroyo bureaucracy and retainers, reigns supreme—this despite the worldwide call for ending the torture and detention by the Catholic Bishops Conference last April 7, by the U.S. National Nurses United (with 150,000 members), and numerous international organizations. Indeed, Arroyo may have already surpassed Marcos in her regime's flagrant atrocities and the military/police brutalization of thousands of suspected citizens, all in the name of free-market democracy and US hegemonic domination over the planet.

A Tradition of Dehumanizing

All the methods recommended in the two CIA manuals cited earlier were employed by the AFP/PNP and legitimized by the Philippine Court of Appeals. We cannot detail here the variations and nuances of their application. Of interest is the use of the element of surprise in the time and manner of arrest so as to achieve "the maximum amount of mental discomfort." The CIA recommends early hours of the morning to arouse "intense feelings of shock, insecurity and psychological stress." To prevent the detainees from relaxing and recovering from the shock, the manual recommends that prisoners be blindfolded, stripped and given a thorough examination, including all body cavities. When 300 soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and Philippine National Police (PNP) personnel "with covered nameplates" descended on the sleeping quarters and training venue of 43 doctors, nurses and trainees, it was early morning. I quote their Press Statement of April 12: "They bodily searched our male and some female companions, herded us into driveway, handcuffed and blindfolded us and brought us to Camp Capinpin," a tightly guarded headquarters of the 202nd Infantry Brigade.

The "standard operating procedure" of the CIA/Pentagon's "shock and awe" strategy is followed. The detainees' plea for lawyers, search warrants, and other demands were turned down; they were segregated, some in solitary confinement. Disruption of routine and normal

life (their reduction to the level of object/animal) was fundamental. The detainees were handcuffed and blindfolded, harassed, threatened for 36 hours, 48 hours for some.” They testify that “We were deprived of sleep and from time to time questioned and forced to admit that we are NPAs [New People Army guerillas]. We were fingerprinted while blindfolded. Our pictures in three views were taken.”

Blackmail, continuous interrogation, repeated threats and intimidation, prolonged constraint (incommunicado), and deprivation of “normal routine” in eating and sleeping, constant surveillance, and everything “to induce psychological regression” by a superior force to bear on his will to resist”—all these can be gleaned from the following testimony released to the public under lawyer’s advice:

“Questioning, threatening and deceitful offers of house and lot, money and freedom in exchange for military ‘cooperation’ by our military captors continued at the detention center anytime of the day until the last week of February. Questions asked by our military captors were not related to the making of explosives or firearms. Some of us are still in isolation cells. We were deprived of legal counsel for 5 days after our arrest and doctors of our own choice. Five of our companions were deceitfully and forcefully removed from our detention center. They are made to cooperate with the military for the latter’s propaganda purposes and to testify against us....

Our outside morning exercises are curtailed, hot water and drinking water is limited or even stopped and sun drying of our laundry is banned if military captors get angry with us for no reason. Confiscation of paper, writing materials, tissue and even plastic continues. Bugging device is installed. We are photographed by our military captors when going to court hearings. We are videotaped when government officials visit us.” Other methods of torture include: denying privacy in the bathrooms, limiting visiting times for family, reshuffling detainees from one jail to another, solitary confinement, constant guarding even with relatives, threats of salvaging or extrajudicial execution; threat of being “roasted” or “rotting in jail,” or killed outright; threat of the arrest of father and mother, and various forms of intimidation.

Doctors from the Council for Health and Democracy, Community Medicine Foundation, and other organizations have “deduced that the military may have also electrocuted” the detainees and used chemical and pharmacological torture” (Marya Salamat, Bulatlat, 1 March 2010 <http://www.bulatlat.com/main/2010/03/01/torture-and-interrogation-of-43-health-workers-continue>).

Sign Your Own Death Sentence

In earlier reports, we learn that apart from grueling interrogations, two of the detainees (Valentin Paulino and Ramon de la Cruz) were forced to admit their membership in the communist New People’s Army by signing affidavits. Paulino complained to his mother that the AFP was subjecting him to beatings and mental torture (BAYAN Press Release, 26 Feb. 2010; in Bulatlat Website). Two others were isolated and pressured to cooperate: Jennilyn Pizarro and John Mark Barrientos. Meanwhile, Cherrilyn Tawagon and Ellen Carandang were offered P50,000 as reward for “rebel returnees.” The detainees were served spoiled meager food, condemned by Father Diony Cabillas as “inhumane and cruel” (reported by Ronalyn Olea, Bulatlat, March 10, 2010).

Acting under orders from their superiors, including Arroyo, Gen. Jorge Segovia and Col.

Aurelio Baladad have refused volunteer medical doctors to examine the detainees. Two of them, Dr. Alex Montes (who was physically manhandled earlier) and Glenda Murillo are suffering serious symptoms, but are denied proper treatment. The Permanent People's Tribunal summarized the classic plight of KUBARK victims in their February letter to Arroyo based on the report of the Philippine Commission on Human Rights: the detainees "remained in handcuffs and blindedfolded for more than 36 hours; they were denied food and bathroom privileges, confined in dark cells, forced to listen to sounds of gunfire and slapped several times during the night. They were not allowed to speak to each other and they were forced to admit that they were members of the New People's Army." Up to now the AFP/PNP have refused to allow them to appear in the Commission's hearings or move them to civilian facilities more accessible to their lawyers and families, all reminiscent of the heyday of the infamous Honduran Battalion 316 and Central American death-squads.

Recurrent in the testimony are practices such as sudden disruption of routines, solitary confinement, threats of pain (to the detainee or her family), sexual molestation, maneuvers of surveillance (photographing, etc.) to which victims of CIA-tutored agents (trained in the School of Americas from 1987 to 1991) were invariably subjected. Though discontinued in 1992 and replaced by the U.S. Army's FM 34-52 Intelligence Interrogation Manual (see Wikipedia on "U.S. Army and CIA Interrogation manuals [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S. Army_and_CIA_interrogation_manuals](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/U.S._Army_and_CIA_interrogation_manuals)), the techniques are obviously still used by the AFP and PNP whose officials receive training from US advisers and US institutions, following various military treaties and executive agreements between the two nations. Since formal independence from the U.S. in 1946, both the AFP and PNP have received millions of tax-dollars in funding for training, equipment and logistics from the Foreign Assistance Program of the U.S. Congress channelled through the CIA, US-AID, and numerous conduits and transmission-belts.

Localizing Subaltern Punishment

A great portion of the infamous CIA KUBARK manual actually originated in the Philippines, according to Alfred McCoy's meticulously documented book *Policing America's Empire* (2009). McCoy describes how US colonial occupation laid the foundation for the current authoritarian state, notably exemplified by the Marcos' martial-law regime. The neocolonial state from Roxas to Arroyo has deployed clandestine penetration, psychological warfare, disinformation, media manipulation, massive surveillance, vigilante or para-military violence, assassination, and so on, to suppress civic criticism and popular dissent. His narrative takes us to the 1950 Cold War and the partnership of President Ramon Magsaysay and Lansdale "when the CIA tested new counterinsurgency doctrines," and later "helped build a massive anti-riot force for metropolitan Manila" (2009, 19).

The CIA and other US agencies were instrumental in training elite Philippine Constabulary units such as the Metrocom Intelligence Service Group (MISG) and the Fifth Constabulary Security Unit (CSU; later renamed Regional Security Unit 4). With such notorious torturers as Col. Rolando Abadilla and Major Rodolfo Aguinaldo, these units (with the help of the "seeds" of the private armies today, the Civilian Home Defense Forces) terrorized the population. From 1979 to 1989, the MISG and CSU displayed extreme brutality in using extensive electric shocks, sensory deprivation, temperature modifications, blindfolding, and psychological techniques such as those inflicted on the Morong 43. Col Abadilla studied at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, and Major Aguinaldo was trained by CIA instructors in still unverified sites.

The Marcos dictatorship prides itself in its record of arresting at least 70,000 people, torturing 35,000 and killing at least 3,257—2,500 of these victims were “salvaged,” that is, tortured and killed, with the scarred remains dumped for display to terrorize the public. Of the many tortured, McCoy cites the case of civic leader Trinidad Herrera. She was arrested in May 1977, “stripped naked, and forced to wind an electric wire around her nipple” by state security led by Edward Matillano and Prudencio Regis, who, after trial, were declared not guilty for any violation. McCoy also cites the case of Melvin Cayabyab, two months pregnant, who was sexually molested, “given electric shocks through wires placed on her thumbs and threatened with rape and application of electric shocks to her vagina and nipples” (406). McCoy observes that “these Filipino interrogators carried the CIA’s psychological paradigm into its ultimate dimension,” to an “expansive theatricality” and “lurid brutality” that may be seen, for example, in Lino Brocka’s still censored film, *ORA PRO NOBIS* or the recent film *DUKOT* directed by Joel Lamangan. Torture has become banal, even trivialized in bureaucratic U.S. State Department Human Rights reports and their nullity in impact.

Remembrance of Things Recurrent

After September 11, 2001, the US war on global terrorism (or Islamic extremism) has retooled the CIA methods for a new type of “low intensity warfare,” as former CIA agent Philip Agee noted in a 2003 review of US “covert actions.” “Low-intensity warfare” was the term for U.S. counterinsurgency in Central and South America, and in the Philippines (see Klare and Kornbluh 1989); its latest incarnation is the presence of a U.S. base of Special Forces in Zamboanga directing the raids against the Abu Sayyaf and the NPA (Docena 2008), and the series of AFP campaigns against the NPA known as Oplan Bantay Laya I and II.

William Blum reminds us that in 1987, during Corazon Aquino’s presidency, Reagan approved a \$10 million, two-year plan for increased CIA involvement in the counterinsurgency campaign. The CIA undertook large-scale psychological warfare operations and U.S. military advisers routinely accompanied Philippine troops during their maneuvers” (2005, 190; see Smith 1976, for CIA relations with Macapagal, Arroyo’s father, and other Filipino politicians). With AFP/PNP assignment to US training centers and with the JUSMAG (Joint U.S. –Philippine Military Advisory Group) and the Visiting Forces Agreement enforcing and preserving Washington/Pentagon’s ascendancy over the Philippine state, we will see the KUBARK trademark visible in the stigmata of torture victims such as the Morong 43 and many others. Indeed, the CIA is alive and well in the Philippines, thanks to the subservience of the decadent quasi-feudal oligarchy, the traditional landlords and compradors whose mercenary generals and judges thrive while nine to ten million OFWs (Overseas Filipino Workers) remit \$14 billion to prop up the bankrupt economy (San Juan 2007).

A huge library of human rights violations, extrajudicial killings, torture, abductions, etc. has accumulated during Arroyo’s tenure. One can cite the cases of human rights activists Eddie Gumanoy, Eden Marcellana, and Benjaline Hernandez who received the KUBARK treatment from Arroyo’s celebrated general Jovito Palparan. Other cases of torture by the military documented by the National Council of Churches in the Philippines, the International Action Center, and the Asian Commission for Human Rights include Pastor Andy Pawican; United Methodist couple Librado and Martina Gallardo; Nueva Vizcayan farmer Ruel Marcial; Pastor Berlin Guerrero; lay missionary Angelina Bisuna-Ipong; Reynaldo and Raymond Manalo, detained and tortured by forces under Gen. Palparan, named by the government’s Melo Commission as responsible for political killings.

In June 2007, Sophie Richardson, deputy director of Human Rights Watch, urged the US to consider suspending military aid to the Philippines unless members of its military suspected in extrajudicial political killings have been prosecuted. Human Rights Watch released its 84-pages report entitled "Scared Silent: Impunity for Extrajudicial Killings in the Philippines" which documents the Arroyo security forces' involvement in murder of members of leftist political parties, nongovernment organizations, journalists, clergy, activists, and so on; none of the military or police implicated in these killings have been successfully prosecuted ("Dirty War by the AFP," Newsweek 28 June 2007). As of October 2009, Arroyo is credited (since Jan. 2001) with 1,118 politically motivated summary executions, 204 enforced disappearances, 1,026 tortured victims, 1,946 illegal arrests, and 255 political prisoners (Lefebvre 2010). Even the recent US State Department report on human rights in the Philippines re-confirmed in general the periodic reports of KARAPATAN on continued impunity for the AFP /PNP in their barbaric ritual of torture practised on the Morong 43 and others.

Apocalypse Now or Tomorrow?

Prompted by the horrendous Maguindanao massacre of 60 civilians in the Philippines last November, Human Rights Watch executive director Kenneth Roth visited the Philippines this week to find out what is being done with private armies. "Nothing can be done about it," leading presidential contenders Noynoy Aquino and Manuel Villar in effect replied. (Philippine Daily Inquirer, April 26, 2010). The recent furor over "waterboarding" terrorist suspects by the occupying US forces in Iraq and Afghanistan evoked the "water cure" systematically used against Filipino revolutionaries in the Filipino-American War of 1899-1913. That war also witnessed hamletting, scorched-earth tactics, shooting prisoners, and clandestine surveillance and assassinations by the US occupying army, a model used by neoconservative pundits like Max Boot for the ongoing US "democratization" of Iraq and Afghanistan. A recent survey by Canadian scholar Priscilla Lefebvre summed up the whole Arroyo tenure as a sustained "war against the people through State violence" (2010). Short of a revolutionary mass upheaval, it appears that the CIA KUBARK torture techniques and its legitimization by the policing and jurisprudence system in the Philippines still have a long way to be "tweaked" and streamlined before its final scrapping.

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