

# Afghanistan and Iraq: War Crimes Against Children ascribed to former President Bush

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Torture has received the most attention among the many war crimes of the Bush administration. But those who support Bush's pursuit of the "war on terror" have not been impressed by recriminations over torture. Worse than torture are the murders of at least 50 prisoners in Abu Ghraib, Afghanistan, and Guantánamo, but again the hard-hearted are unimpressed when those whom they perceive as terrorists receive illegal extrajudicial capital punishment.

The case for abusing children, however, is more difficult to support. The best kept secret of the Bush's war crimes is that thousands of children have been imprisoned, tortured, and otherwise denied rights under the Geneva Conventions and related international agreements. Yet both Congress and the media have strangely failed to identify the very existence of child prisoners as a war crime. In the Islamic world, however, there is no such silence. Indeed, the prophet Mohammed was the first to counsel warriors not to harm innocent children.

From jailing children together with adults in prisons where they were raped to failing to notify their parents of their arrest, the U.S. committed numerous war crimes against children in Afghanistan and Iraq, a new book on President Bush states.

"American guards videotaped Iraqi male prisoners raping young boys but took no action to stop the offenses (and) children in Abu Ghraib were deliberately frightened by dogs," writes political scientist Michael Haas in his new book, "George W. Bush, War Criminal?" (Praeger), a question he answers in the affirmative.

"In most cases, weeks or even years elapsed before parents were informed of the imprisonment of their children," says Haas, noting that in Afghanistan alone during 2002 "at least 800 boys, aged 10 to 15 were captured", 64 of whom were sent to Guantanamo, Cuba, where some were flung into solitary confinement. Haas notes that Protocol 1 of the 1977 Geneva Convention states "No Party to the conflict shall arrange for the evacuation of children, other than its own nationals, to a foreign country" unless written consent of the parents is obtained.

In a wide-ranging 389-page volume that documents 269 different classes of war crimes perpetrated by the Bush administration, some of them repeated hundreds or thousands of times, Haas systematically exposes the former president's reckless disregard for child

welfare.

To begin with, Bush's legal advisors disputed the very definition of "child" as a person under 18 years of age who needs special protection. That's the definition spelled out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The U.S. defined "child" as someone age 16 or younger. The U.S. last year told the UN's Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) since 2002 it had detained 2,400 children in Iraq and 100 in Afghanistan although other sources state the latter figure was 800. (Irrespective of the number, it is a war crime to detain any person indefinitely, which was the case here.) Also, as of May, 2008, there were 21 children incarcerated in Guantanamo. The CRC has "upbraided the United States for charging minors with war crimes instead of treating underage persons as victims of war," Haas writes..

Contrary to the CRC's Article 9, which states that a captured child shall be allowed to "maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis," some children were not allowed to write or telephone home for as long as five years.

And where CRC's Article 13 guarantees "The child shall have the right to freedom to...seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print," Haas points out "Most children were held incommunicado at Guantanamo until April, 2003" and that one child, Mohammed Jawad "remains in solitary confinement." Jawad received promises of books to study that have not been kept, Haas adds.

Other violations of international covenants pertaining to children include:

- # The failure to stop mistreatment of children,
- # The failure to investigate the abuse of children.
- # The failure to prosecute prison personnel allegedly guilty of such abuse.
- # The failure to allow parents to visit children.
- # The failure to allow children to have legal counsel.
- # The failure to provide children with speedy trials.
- # The failure to promptly inform children of the crimes against them.
- # The failure to allow witnesses to testify in behalf of children.
- # The failure to provide children with social programs.

And although CRC Article 31 requires that children have the right "to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child," Haas writes, "There is no record of recreation for the hundreds of children detained at Bagram or at Abu Ghraib."

The CRC's Article 37 requires that "No child shall be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment" yet at Abu Ghraib a girl of about 12 was stripped naked and beaten, according to Iraqi journalist Suhaib Badr-Addin al-Baz, who heard her screams. He also witnessed a 15-year-old boy forced to run up and down the prison carrying two heavy cans of water who was beaten whenever he stopped. On yet

another occasion, authorities arrested the 16-year-old son of Iraqi General Hamid Zabar and tortured him before presenting him to his father, whom they wanted to confess. These and several hundred other war crimes are detailed in the new book.

*Professor Haas is the author or editor of 33 books on government and world politics. He has taught at a number of outstanding schools, including the University of London and Northwestern University. To receive his book, send check in the amount of \$32 to Haas at P.O. Box 46127, Los Angeles, CA 90046. Haas may be reached at [mikehaas@aol.com](mailto:mikehaas@aol.com).*

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