

Bradley Manning Treatment Reveals Continued Government Complicity in Torture

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Army Pfc. Bradley Manning, who is facing court-martial for leaking military reports and diplomatic cables to WikiLeaks, is being held in solitary confinement in Quantico brig in Virginia. Each night, he is forced to strip naked and sleep in a gown made of coarse material. He has been made to stand naked in the morning as other inmates walked by and looked. As journalist Lance Tapley documents in his chapter on torture in the supermax prisons in The United States and Torture, solitary confinement can lead to hallucinations and suicide; it is considered to be torture. Manning's forced nudity amounts to humiliating and degrading treatment, in violation of U.S. and international law.

Nevertheless, President Barack Obama defended Manning's treatment, saying, "I've actually asked the Pentagon whether or not the procedures . . . are appropriate. They assured me they are." Obama's deference is reminiscent of President George W. Bush, who asked "the most senior legal officers in the U.S. government" to review the interrogation techniques. "They assured me they did not constitute torture," Bush said.

The order for Manning's nudity apparently followed what he described as a sarcastic comment he made to guards after their repeated harassment of him regarding how he was to salute them. Manning said that if he were intent on strangling himself, he could use his underwear or flip-flops.

"In my 40 years of hospital psychiatric practice, I've never heard of something like this," said Dr. Steven Sharfstein, a former president of the American Psychiatric Association. "In some very unusual circumstances, when people are intensely suicidal, you might put them in a hospital gown. . . . But it's very, very unusual to be in that kind of suicide watch for this long a period of time."

Sharfstein also was concerned that military officials appeared to defy the recommendations of mental health professionals. "He's been examined by psychiatrists who said he's not suicidal. . . . They are making medical judgments in the face of medical evaluations to the contrary," Sharfstein noted.

After State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley criticized Manning's conditions of confinement, the White House forced him to resign. Crowley had said the restrictions were "ridiculous, counterproductive and stupid." It appears that Washington is more intent on sending a message to would-be whistleblowers than on upholding the laws that prohibit torture and abuse.

Torture is commonplace in countries strongly allied with the United States. Vice President Omar Suleiman, Egypt's intelligence chief, was the lynchpin for Egyptian torture when the CIA sent prisoners to Egypt in its extraordinary rendition program. A former CIA agent observed, "If you want a serious interrogation, you send a prisoner to Jordan. If you want them to be tortured, you send them to Syria. If you want someone to disappear - never to see them again - you send them to Egypt." In her chapter in *The United States and Torture*, New Yorker journalist Jane Mayer cites Egypt as the most common destination for suspects rendered by the United States.

She describes the rendering of Ibn al-Sheikh al-Libi to Egypt, where he was tortured and made a false confession that Colin Powell cited as he importuned the Security Council to approve the U.S. invasion of Iraq. Al-Libi later recanted his confession.

Although there is general consensus that torture does not work - the subject will say anything to get the torture to stop - what if it did work? Would that justify torturing people into providing information? Philosopher John Lango's chapter asks whether an extreme emergency can ever trump the absolute prohibition of torture. Lango rejects the nuclear weapon and ticking bomb scenarios as "fantasy" and declares, "Terrorism can never warrant terroristic torment." He suggests a protocol to the Convention against Torture to fortify the moral prohibition of torture and cruel treatment.

The moral equivalence of torture and "one-sided warfare" is explored in Professor Richard Falk's provocative chapter. He contrasts the liberal moral outrage at torture with uncritical acceptance of one-sided warfare. Nations, particularly the United States, inflict horrific pain on primarily non-white people in other countries, but suffer no consequences. Falk draws an analogy between the torture victim and the subjects of one-sided warfare - both are under the total control of the perpetrator. He recommends adherence to international humanitarian law and repudiation of "wars of choice."

In *The United States and Torture*, an historian, a political scientist, a philosopher, a psychologist, a sociologist, two journalists and eight lawyers detail the complicity of the U.S. government in the torture and cruel treatment of prisoners both at home and abroad, and strategies for accountability. In her compelling preface, Sister Dianna Ortiz describes the unimaginable treatment she endured in 1987 when she was in Guatemala doing missionary work while the United States was supporting the dictatorship there. The first step in changing policy is to understand its history and the motivation behind it. I hope this book will accomplish that goal.

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