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Bush Adminstration Post-Constitutional Order: "It Was Real 'Manchurian Candidate' Stuff"

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Theme: Crimes against Humanity, Police State & Civil Rights

A Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) investigation has concluded that top Pentagon officials had assembled lists of harsh torture techniques in the summer of 2002 for use on prisoners in America's Guantánamo Bay prison gulag.

The Senate's findings strongly refute claims by top Bush administration officials that their approval of such techniques were in response to requests from field commanders "far down the chain of command," *The Washington Post* **reports**. According to Joby Warrick,

> The sources said that memos and other evidence obtained during the inquiry show that officials in the office of then-Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld started to research the use of waterboarding, stress positions, sensory deprivation and other practices in July 2002, months before memos from commanders at the detention facility in Cuba requested permission to use those measures on suspected terrorists. ("Report Questions Pentagon Accounts," The Washington Post, June 17, 2008)

During hearings Tuesday before the Senate Armed Services Committee, it was revealed that the CIA played a larger role in the Bush administration's "enhanced interrogation" policies than previously acknowledged. Torture, according to minutes of an October 2, 2002 meeting at Guantánamo Bay, "is basically subject to perception," CIA counterterrorism lawyer Jonathan Fredman told a group of military and intelligence officials. "If the detainee dies, you're doing it wrong," ***The Washington Post*** reports.

The hearings, and supporting **documents** released by the SASC, revealed that Fredman, whose Agency handlers had been granted virtual carte blanche by the Justice Department to torture suspected "terrorists," discussed

> the pros and cons of videotaping, talked about how to avoid interference by the International Committee of the Red Cross and offered a strong defense of waterboarding.
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> "If a well-trained individual is used to perform this technique, it can feel like you're drowning," he said, according to the meeting's minutes, which do not provide a verbatim transcript.
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> Fredman said medical experts should monitor detainees. "If someone dies while aggressive techniques are being used, regardless of the cause of death, the backlash of attention would be severely detrimental," he was quoted as saying. (Joby Warrick, "CIA Played Larger Role in Advising Pentagon," The Washington Post, June 18, 2008)

While Fredman's "expertise" on abusing prisoners recommends placing physicians, psychiatrists and other trained medical personnel in American torture chambers, in itself a clear breech of international norms and the military's own procedures, his callous disregard for human rights hardly absolve high-level administration officials.

As **ABC News** reported in April, during dozens of top-secret talks and meetings at the White House, the National Security Council Principals Committee, which included Vice President Dick Cheney, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State Colin Powell, CIA Director George Tenet and Attorney General John Ashcroft, "discussed and approved specific details" of how "high-value" prisoners would be interrogated.

Indeed, so explicit were these discussions that one source told ABC News, "the interrogation sessions were almost choreographed." One top official reported Ashcroft as having said, "Why are we talking about this in the White House? History will not judge this kindly."

In a **statement** released Tuesday, Senator Carl Levin (D-MI), Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, wrote:

> …how did it come about that American military personnel stripped detainees naked, put them in stress positions, used dogs to scare them, put leashes around their necks to humiliate them, hooded them, deprived them of sleep, and blasted music at them. Were these actions the result of "a few bad apples" acting on their own? It would be a lot easier to accept if it were. But that's not the case. The truth is that senior officials in the United States government sought information on aggressive techniques, twisted the law to create the appearance of their legality, and authorized their use against detainees. ("The Origins of Aggressive Interrogation Techniques," Carl Levin, United States Senator, June 17, 2008)

As Philippe Sands' investigative piece in last month's ***Vanity Fair*** revealed, after the Principals Committee reached a decision to torture, Bush administration "little Eichmanns" provided the necessary "legal" gloss to implement these criminal policies:

> The fingerprints of the most senior lawyers in the administration were all over the design and implementation of the abusive interrogation policies. [David] Addington, [Jay] Bybee, [Alberto] Gonzales, [Jim] Haynes, and [John] Yoo became, in effect, a torture team of lawyers, freeing the administration from the constraints of all international rules prohibiting abuse. ("The Green Light," Vanity Fair, May 2008)

But as *The Washington Post* reported Tuesday, the new evidence presented by the Armed Services Committee challenged previous statements by

> William J. "Jim" Haynes II, who served as Defense Department general counsel under Rumsfeld and is among the witnesses scheduled to testify at today's hearing. Haynes, who resigned in February, suggested to a Senate panel in 2006 that the request for tougher interrogation methods originated in October 2002, when Guantanamo Bay commanders began asking for help in ratcheting up the pressure on suspected terrorists who had stopped cooperating. A memo from the prison's top military lawyer that same month had suggested specific techniques and declared them legal.

However, “memos and e-mails” obtained by Senate investigators suggest otherwise. In July 2002, Haynes and other top Defense Department officials “were soliciting ideas for harsh interrogations from military experts in survival training.” By late July, despite strenuous objections by military lawyers who viewed such methods as patently illegal breeches of the Geneva Convention, a list was compiled that included many of the torture techniques that infamously became synonymous with the Guantánamo, Abu Ghraib and Bagram airbase repertoire.

Indeed, military criminal investigators, “attempting to develop evidence to prosecute suspected terrorists, objected strenuously to techniques they considered illegal and likely to damage chances of a conviction,” ***The Wall Street Journal*** reports. *Journal* reporter Jess Bravin reveals that,

> In an October 2002 email to a colleague, Special Agent Mark Fallon of the Naval Criminal Investigative Service said that comments like those of Col. Beaver and Mr. Fredman could “shock the conscience of any legal body” looking into interrogation methods. “This looks like the kinds of stuff Congressional hearings are made of,” he wrote. (“Ex-Pentagon Lawyers Challenged on Torture,” The Wall Street Journal, June 18, 2008)

In a major breakthrough that demolish the mendacious claims of the Bush regime, the Senate report provides irrefutable evidence that top Pentagon and CIA officials sought out military and “outsourced” mercenary personnel, including psychologists, to reverse-engineer U.S. military Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape (SERE) tactics taught pilots and Special Operations Commandos caught behind enemy lines for use on prisoners designated “enemy combatants” by the administration.

According to Levin, in July 2002, Richard Shiffrin, a Pentagon Deputy General Counsel called Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Baumgartner, the Chief of Staff at the Joint Personnel Recovery Agency (JPRA), the DoD bureau that oversees SERE training “and asked for information on SERE techniques.”

Baumgartner responded by drafting a memo with three attachments. According to Levin’s statement and supporting documentation released by the SASC,

> One of those attachments (TAB 3) listed physical and psychological pressures used in SERE resistance training including sensory deprivation, sleep disruption, stress positions, waterboarding, and slapping. It also made reference to a section of the JPRA instructor manual that talks about “coercive pressures” like keeping the lights at all times, and treating a person like an animal. Another attachment (TAB 4), written by Dr. Ogrisseg, also a witness today, assessed the long-term psychological effects of SERE resistance training on students and the effects of the waterboard.

Scarcely a week after Baumgartner’s memo, the Justice Department’s Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) issued two opinions drafted by Jay Bybee and John C. Yoo addressed to White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales. These are the infamous Torture Memos, one of which still remains classified.

As current Assistant Attorney General of the OLC Steven Bradbury testified earlier this year before the House Judiciary Committee, the “CIA’s use of the waterboarding procedure was

adapted from the SERE training program."

At this point, JPRA staff were "finalizing plans" to conduct training for interrogation staff from U.S. Southern Command's Joint Task Force 170 at Guantánamo Bay.

In mid-September 2002, a group from Guantánamo, "including interrogators and behavioral scientists, travelled to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and attended training conducted by instructors from the JPRA SERE school. None of the three JPRA personnel who provided the training was a trained interrogator," Levin reveals.

As I **wrote** in April, those who committed these unspeakable atrocities "were acting out scenes from a CIA 'masterwork' composed decades earlier: **KUBARK Counterintelligence Interrogation**."

The July 1963 CIA torture manual describes a fear-cloaked shadow world of hooding, isolation, sensory deprivation, drugging, sexual humiliation and other unseemly interrogation techniques, many of which were "perfected" by "outsourced" psychiatrists on their patients during the 1950s and 1960s during the Agency's criminal MKULTRA "mind-control" experiments.

Fast-forward 50 years, and the fruit of these Nazi-like experiments in psychological torment are all-too-discernible in the hollowed-out eyes and shattered minds of America's "war on terror" prisoners. As former Pentagon lawyer Richard Shiffrin told ***The New York Times***, the Rumsfeld's Defense Department turned to SERE out of "great frustration" at the nature of the intelligence obtained from prisoners through lawful means.

As *Salon* investigative journalist Mark Benjamin, a reporter who broke many stories on the **reverse-engineering** of SERE tactics as a torture tool, **writes**,

> But as more and more documents from inside the Bush government come to light, it is increasingly clear that the administration sought from early on to implement interrogation techniques whose basis was torture. Soon after the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the Pentagon and the CIA began an orchestrated effort to tap expertise from the military's Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape school, for use in the interrogation of terrorist suspects. …
>
> SERE training has nothing to do with effective interrogation, according to military experts. Trained interrogators don't work in the program. Skilled, experienced interrogators, in fact, say that only a fool would think that the training could somehow be reverse-engineered into effective interrogation techniques.
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> But that's exactly what the Bush government sought to do. As the plan rolled forward, military and law enforcement officials consistently sent up red flags that the SERE-based interrogation program wasn't just wrongheaded, it was probably illegal. ("A Timeline to Bush Government Torture," Salon, June 18, 2008)

What were the results obtained by Shiffrin and others into the efficacy of reverse-engineered SERE tactics? "It was real 'Manchurian Candidate' stuff," Shiffrin told the *Times*.

An apt description if ever there were one, of the post-Constitutional order created by the Bush administration and their corporatist masters. Why then, do top Democratic party

leaders, including Carl Levin, continue to insist “impeachment is off the table”?

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