

Children's Rights in the War Theater: Who Guards the Guards?

The US army has detained 2,400 children as young as ten years old since March 2003

By [Felicity Arbuthnot](#)

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'He never slept in a bed of myths, He didn't live his childhood.'
'Song', Adonis (Ali Ahmad Said) Victims of a Map, Saqi Books.

On 27th May 2008, Save the Children released a Report which 'shows that children living in conflict affected countries fear to report sexual exploitation and abuse by UN peace keeping troops and humanitarian aid workers.'

'Children told Save the Children UK that they were too afraid to report the abuse, frightened that if they did, the abuser might come back and hurt them ...or that they might be stigmatized by their family and community, or even punished by them.'

Jasmine Whitbread, Chief Executive of Save the Children UK., said: "This research exposes the despicable actions of a small number of perpetrators who are sexually abusing some of the most vulnerable children in the world, the very children they are meant to protect ..."



Abuse by UN peacekeepers is a shocking, shameful, inexcusable stain on the world body, that they have been either unwilling, or unable, to eradicate for decades. An eminent professional who recorded appalling cases he had recorded in an African country fifteen years ago, told me how he had been awoken by a hail of bullets which killed his driver, who was sleeping in the same room as him, in a remote area of Africa, a day after reporting his findings to the highest level, at the UN in that country. A man of cool nerve, experienced in war zones and no conspiracy theorist, he is convinced that the bullets were meant for him – and came not a million miles from UN personnel themselves. Nevertheless, the UN purports to try to eradicate this disgrace and at least Save the Children and other agencies have access to the abused and can record and continue to draw the world's attention to a shame of enormity.

However, 'quis custodiat ipsos custodes'? 'Who guards the guards'? Suppose the abusers

are the United States military and the abused children are in their custody in Iraq.

Neither Save the Children, Amnesty, Human Rights Watch or other agencies have been allowed in to the facilities where Iraqi children as young as ten are incarcerated in Iraq, under the oversight of Major General Douglas Stone, Deputy Commanding General Detainee Operations, Multi National Force-Iraq.

The US army has detained 2,400 children as young as ten years old since March 2003, according to a 21st May 2008 Human Rights Watch statement (some estimates are higher.). Stone, who took over the position in May 2007, has named one correctional facility 'The House of Wisdom', after the famous 9th to 13th century Bayt al Hikmah (House of Wisdom) at which scholars from around the globe studied and where Plato, Hippocrates, Euclid and Pythagoras were translated from the Greek and where algebra was born.

In its 21 May statement, HRW said detention rates for children had risen drastically in 2007 to an average of 100 new cases a month from 25 a month in 2006. As of 12 May this year, the US military authorities were holding 513 Iraqi children classified as "imperative threats to security", HRW said in a statement.

Stone has said he is now fighting a 'battlefield of the mind', introducing education and 'religious enlightenment' to detainees. Amongst his charges of all ages are: '..rotten eggs, you know, hiding in the Easter basket.' Psychiatrists, psychologists, counselors and interrogators help identify these miscreants. Juveniles are allowed no outside legal representation, according to the UN Special Representative for Children in Armed Conflict, Radhika Coomaraswamy and there are allegations that, as with women, they are often held to force an adult family male to give himself up. Human rights abuses plummet little lower, apart from rape and child abuse.

Whether the US military - a career path so unpopular that it is reduced to recruiting felons and near illiterates - can aid Stone's 're-education' project for his charges is doubtful, if not anyway, illegal.

Stone himself has a degree from Stanford University (motto: 'Die Luft der Freiheit wehr'; trans: 'The wind of freedom blows.' Sound suspiciously like: 'Arbeit macht man frei.'). Nevertheless, in spite reports which have leaked out of violence and of one youth killing another, Stone has informed the media that parents and children often beg to for sentences behind bars to be extended so that studies can be continued. The blogger who wrote: 'Fifth column shit bags', related to this nonsense, saves me the trouble of commenting.

Given the horrifying behavior of the US military in Abu Ghraib and the lack of accessibility by outside agencies to detention facilities (the International Committee of the Red Cross confirm that they do have access, but their policy is not to disclose details of visits) transparent oversight is glaringly absent. Further there is only the assurance of this discredited military that just Camp Cropper near Baghdad airport and Camp Bucca in Basra are the only facilities holding children. There are numerous US prisons throughout Iraq, to find there were other disappeared children, in as yet unknown facilities, would be less than surprising.

To know children may not in safe hands, all that is needed is to read Seymour Hersh on the subject. Just one example is his address in Chicago in July 2004 at an American Civil Liberties Union event. He stated that the US government has videotapes of children being

raped at Abu Ghraib. 'Boys were sodomized with the cameras rolling. And worst above all of that is the soundtrack of the boys shrieking ... They were in total terror.' A month earlier he was reported as saying: '..horrible things done to children of women prisoners, as the cameras run.'

On 5th July 2004, 'Report Mainz', of the German TV station Sudwest-Rundfunk showed interviews with testimonies of those who affirmed not only seeing children in Abu Ghraib, but of a boy and twelve year old girl, terrified, as cold water and mud was thrown over them by personnel, to persuade parents to co-operate with the authorities. The Kulturzeit programme of 3Sat also covered the subject, expressing concern that children were arrested and used to exert pressure on their parents.

In August 2006, John Yoo, then deputy assistant to Attorney General John Ashcroft 'publicly argued that there is no law that could prevent the President from ordering the torture of a child of a suspect in custody - including by crushing that child's testicles.' (See: 'Bush Advisor says President has Legal Power to Torture Children', Philip Watts, 1st August 2006, <http://www.revcom.us>) RIP the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. All of the children will have only known life under U.S.' and U.K., embargo, bombings and then the invasion's ultimate terror and horror.

General Stone calls detaining and the sinister 're-educating' of children: 'the battlefield of the brain.' Clearly not the brightest star in the military firmament, he has also 'hired an outside company to study the entire insurgency to try and figure out (their) motivation' Asking Iraqis if they are tired of being starved, raided, raped, shot, arrested and if they want their country back might be a cheaper option.

Further a survey conducted for the Surgeon General of U.S., Army Medical Command, found the majority of soldiers and a higher one of marines neither believed that civilians should be treated with respect and just 55% said they would report a colleague for killing or injuring the innocent (just 40% of marines said they would.) Veterans recently described opening fire on children and shooting up can of gasoline being sold by the roadside, then tossing grenades in to the resultant pools setting them ablaze. Children are a huge part of this trade.

This month intelligence officer Lt. Andre Grayson was cleared of covering up over the Haditha massacre when little Abeer al Janabi was gang raped by U.S, soldiers, killed and her family and siblings killed and all burned. Grayson had been accused of ordering another marine to delete photographs from computer and digital camera and of lying to investigators.

If knowns are treated so lightly in troops that have 'become socialized to atrocity' (See 'War and Occupation American Style', Chris Hedges and Tom Engelhardt, 4th June 2008) what is happening in Iraq's U.S., run child gulags?

Perhaps the most chilling indication of the possible fate of Iraqi children under U.S., watch, has been exposed in the Swedish media. Two respected Swedish journalists, Tiris Christenson and Thorbjorn Anderson, disguised and travelling in an ancient Brazilian Volkswagen, with commendable courage followed and filmed the sale of children in a large market in central Baghdad. The sale ranged from infants to adolescents. They recorded the sale of four year old Zahra, for five hundred US dollars. Children are also sold, they recorded, at the ancient copper market.

'The amazing thing', records Layla Anwar, 'is that the reporter talks about a place where children are sold and shows it on a map inside the Green Zone (the American controlled central Baghdad fortress) and no one knows to whom and where the children are being sold and taken to.' (<http://www.uruknet.info?p=44533>) Aid agencies worth their name should be beating a path to Iraq and demanding unannounced access to every military facility holding and every nook and cranny of the Green Zone, where it has long been rumored that mercenaries run lucrative sidelines in access to youthful bodies.

There has also been a deafening silence from the military in response to The International Committee for Solidarity with Prisoners and Detainees in American Jails Iraq (<http://www.wpai-isolation.info>) who released a statement on 26th April 2008, signed by one hundred and twenty politicians, academics, lawyers and journalists calling for the protection of the rights of prisoners in Iraq. They have demanded that 'U.S., forces apply the articles of the Geneva Protocols respecting prisoners, cease and desist all forms of torture and allow (access by) international judicial and constitutional committees...' They claim greater numbers than this article, writing: 'There are thousands of teenagers, females and kids who were detained as hostages in lieu of their spouses or fathers.'

Whilst the U.S. Administration lambastes a swathe of the world for human rights abuses, they would do better (yet again) to look closer to home for sadistic depravity on a grand scale. And their entire crusading, Qu'ran-desecrating, bible-carrying legislators, from the President and Commander and Chief, down to his Commanders and soldiers in the field, could do well to dwell on Matthew (18.6) and the words of their Savior: 'Who so shall offend one of these little ones... it were better that a millstone was hanged about his neck and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea.'

They could also reflect on the words of Margaret Hassan, Head of Care, Iraq, another terribly tortured and believed murdered on their watch, who warned poignantly in early 2003, at the United Nations and the British Parliament, prior to the invasion, that it would bring about: 'Another lost generation of Iraqi children.' If only you knew, my friend, if only you knew.

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