

## Enduring Torture

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Since the release of the *Taguba Report* on U.S. treatment of Iraqi prisoners of war (POWs) and detainees, the unlawful practices of torture and abuses continue at an increasing rate and brutality. Thanks to Western governments and media complicity in the crimes, the practices are becoming part of the West sacred “shared values”.

A [new report](#) by the U.S.-based Human Rights Watch (HRW) based on soldiers’ testimony, reveals that those troops were following orders on how to torture, and abuse Iraqi detainees and POWs. The report “differs from the previous accounts and lurid photographs the public has seen detailing prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib”, said Tom Malinowski, Washington director of HRW. “A lot of people have heard about this before. But I don’t think they have heard a West Point-educated officer who fought on the front lines in Iraq and Afghanistan say what happened was wrong, what happened was systemic, and was the result of leadership failures”, he added. Iraqi prisoners were abused and tortured while they were blindfolded and handcuffed by U.S. soldiers.

The report entitled “[Leadership Failure](#)” was compiled from interviews with a captain and two sergeants who were stationed at a military base called Forward Operating Base (FOB) Mercury near Fallujah. Residents of Fallujah, referred to the unit as “The Murderous Maniacs”, because of their treatment of detainees, said the report. Other alleged abuses described in the Human Rights report occurred at Camp Tiger, near Iraq’s border with Syria, and in Afghanistan. In addition, the report details what the Captain says was his “unsuccessful effort over 17 months to get the attention of military superiors, before he ultimately approached the Republican senators”.

Under international human rights law, the Geneva Conventions, and the U.S. Army Field Manual 19-4 covering enemy prisoners of war operations, Military Police and occupying authorities have responsibility of safeguarding, accounting for, and maintaining captives and detainees. However, in contravention of the laws and human decency, U.S. brutality continues to inflict great damage on the Iraqi people and the Iraqi society at large.

One of the sergeants who served in Iraq from August 2003 to April 2004, told HRW in four separate occasions in July and August 2005 that: “The ‘Murderous Maniacs’ was what they called us at our camp because they knew if they got caught by us and got detained by us before they went to Abu Ghraib then it would be hell to pay. They would be just, you know, you couldn’t even imagine. It was sort of like I told you when they came in it was like a game. You know, how far could you make this guy goes before he passes out or just collapses on you. From stress positions to keeping them up fucking two days straight, whatever. Deprive them of food water, whatever”.

Iraqi POWs and detainees were called PUCs, for '*Persons Under Control*' to distinguish them from POWs, "a practice that first began in Afghanistan after the Pentagon announced that it did not consider detainees captured there subject to the protections afforded by the Geneva Conventions for POWs", said the report. In some cases, individuals were believed to have been held in secret locations or "disappeared", in contravention of the UN Declaration on the protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance (1992). According to U.S. report released recently, at least 108 prisoners have died violently while in U.S. custody, as a result of torture.

The sergeant told HRW: "To Fuck a PUC means to beat him up. We would give them blows to the head, chest, legs, and stomach, pull them down, [and] kick dirt on them. This happened every day", he added. "To smoke someone is to put them in stress positions until they get muscle fatigue and pass out. That happened every day. Some days we would just get bored so we would have everyone sit in a corner and then make them get in a pyramid. This was before Abu Ghraib but just like it. We did that for amusement. In a way it was sport", the soldier revealed.

Furthermore, the sergeant said that military intelligence personnel and C.I.A. agents, eager for information, often instructed soldiers to 'smoke' detainees during questioning. "Smoking prisoners meant physically abusing them until they lost consciousness" or pass out. The beatings were "so severe that they resulted in broken bones 'every other week". According to one sergeant's testimony, an Army cook, who shouldn't be there with the prisoners at all, broke the leg of a detainee with a mini Louisville Slugger that was a metal bat.

"We knew where the Geneva Conventions drew the line, but then you get that confusion when the Sec Def [Secretary of Defence] and the President make that statement [that Geneva did not apply to detainees] ... Had I thought we were following the Geneva Conventions as an officer I would have investigated what was clearly a very suspicious situation, ... Iraq was cast as part of the War on Terror, not a separate entity in and of itself but a part of a larger war... [W]e were never briefed on the Geneva Conventions", said one of the sergeants in the report.

Contrary to allegations of ambiguity, the Geneva Conventions of 1946 were very clear with regard to treatment of detainees and POWs. Article 3 "prohibits at any time and in any place whatsoever, ... violence to life and person, in particular murder of all kinds, mutilation, cruel treatment and torture, [and] outrages upon personal dignity, in particular, humiliating and degrading treatment". The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights also prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatments, including during period of public emergency.

The soldiers alleged that they were unaware of the Geneva Conventions until they saw Donald Rumsfeld on television in 2004 testifying before a Congressional committee that the U.S. was following the Geneva Conventions to the letter in Iraq. The Captain told HRW: "I knew something was wrong". The Monday morning after Rumsfeld's testimony, "I approached my chain of command" trying very hard to get clarification of rules on prisoners' treatment and the application of the Geneva Conventions. At one point, the Captain said, his Company commander told him; "Remember the honour of the unit is at stake", and, "Don't expect me to go to bat for you on this issue". The reality is that these "coercive interrogation methods" were approved by Mr. Rumsfeld for use on the detainees at Guantánamo Bay in Cuba and later transferred to Iraq to be used on Iraqi detainees and

POWs.

The evidence provided by the soldiers, according to HRW, “suggests that the mistreatment of prisoners by the U.S. military is even more widespread than has been acknowledged to date, including among troops belonging to some of the best trained, most decorated and highly respected units in the U.S. Army”. It wasn’t just ‘few bad apples’ at a single facility – Abu Ghraib –, as the Bush administration claimed in April 2004, the practices are part of a systemic policy approved by the Bush and Blair governments and used all over Iraq, from Kirkuk to Basra.

The HRW report also confirms earlier report by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which said military intelligence officers “confirmed that it was part of the military intelligence process ... to use inhumane and degrading treatment, including physical and psychological coercions”. This included beatings with hard objects including pistols and rifles” and prisoners being “paraded naked outside cells ... sometimes hooded or with women’s underwear over their heads”. The practices of abuse and torture have not stopped because of the Abu Ghraib scandals, they continue today unreported.

The three soldiers told HRW that half of the detainees at Mercury base were released because they were innocent and “they didn’t do anything, but left with the physical and mental scars of torture”. In 2004, U.S. intelligence officers told the ICRC that “in their estimate between 70 % and 90% of the 43,000 Iraqi persons deprived of their liberty in Iraq had been arrested by mistake”, and that the information collected had no significant value. These were people who were arrested and detained during random house raids and at checkpoints and road blocks. This suggests that the flawed argument advanced by Western politicians, obscure academics and imperial ideologues to justify torture is merely “a chronic psychological blindness” against particular groups of innocent people, such as Arabs and Muslims.

The documented sadistic, blatant, and wanton criminal abuses, such as sleep deprivation, subjecting detainees to extremes of hot and cold, the stacking of detainees into human pyramids, blows and kicks to the face, chest, abdomen and extremities, as well as application of chemical substances to exposed skin and eyes are also listed in the report as forms of mistreatment at the military base. It should be borne in mind that these are the methods developed and used by another Western “democratic” state, Israel. Like their brethren in Iraq, Palestinians have endured decades of these criminal practices, welcomed with deafening silence in the West.

The HRW report contradicts claims by Western powers, mainstream media and Western liberals, that the invasion was “morally justified” and that the abuses and torture of Iraqi POWs and detainees were infrequent and unrelated to U.S. policy. The invasion was an illegal and premeditated act of aggression, which has been rightly compared to the ‘Supreme International Crime’ condemned at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal.

In addition to the destruction of the Iraqi society, hundreds of thousands of innocent Iraqi men, women and children have been needlessly killed by U.S. forces and their collaborators. In today’s Iraq, there are more prisons and innocent Iraqi prisoners than at any time in the past. The living conditions of Iraqis are worse than during the deliberately orchestrated genocidal sanctions and before the invasion. The best health care and education systems in the region have been destroyed, and will not be constructed under occupation. It is rational that the majority of the people of Iraq are against the presence of the occupying forces in

their country, and that more Iraqis are publicly acknowledging that Iraq was a better place before the U.S. invasion and occupation.

As I write these lines, U.S. forces are attacking the city of Ramadi on the Euphrates River. The city of about 300,000 people is the capital of the Anbar province, and has been frequently bombed and besieged by U.S. forces in the past several months. Like Fallujah and Tel Afar, Western mainstream media soon will find a pretext to justify the unabated murderous offensive war against the people of Ramadi. Moreover, U.S. forces and their collaborators continue their provocative attacks on population centres in Baghdad, where unknown large number of civilians were reported to have been killed.

The most enduring torture is the ongoing Occupation of Iraq and the silence of the world community to demand the immediate and full withdrawal of the U.S. and British “murderous maniacs” fro Iraq. As specified in the Geneva Conventions and the U.S. War Crimes Act of 1996, it is criminal offensive to commit war crimes – by U.S. military personnel and U.S. nationals. Not only should those who committed the crimes be indicted with war crimes, but also their accomplices who advocate the ongoing occupation and its crimes.

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