

God, Country and Torture

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This incisive article on torture by Bill Blum was published by Global Research more than ten years ago. It is of particular relevance in our understanding of the insidious Senate report on CIA torture

On October 21, 1994, the United States became a State Party to the “Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment”. Article 2, section 2 of the Convention states: “No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification for torture.”

“If you open the window [of torture], even just a crack, the cold air of the middle ages will fill the whole room.”{1}

“The thing with the soldiers there, they think because we’re Americans, you can do whatever you want,” said Spc. Ramon Leal, an MP who served at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq.

“You get a burning in your stomach, a rush, a feeling of hot lead running through your veins, and you get a sense of power,” said another soldier. “Imagine wearing point-blank body armor, an M-16 and all the power in the world, and the authority of God. That power is very addictive.”{2}

America and God ... Bush, Cheney, and other eminences of the imperial mafia know well how to invoke these feelings; with the help of the rest of flag-wavin’ and bible-wavin’ America the proper emotions can be easily imparted down to the ranks. The American part — the mystique of “America” — can also be exported, and has been for decades. Here’s Chief Inspector Basil Lambrou, one of Athens’ well-known torturers under the infamous Greek junta of 1967-74. Hundreds of prisoners listened to this little speech given by the Inspector, who sat behind his desk which displayed the red, white, and blue clasped-hand symbol of American aid. He tried to show the prisoner the absolute futility of resistance: “You make yourself ridiculous by thinking you can do anything. The world is divided in two. There are the communists on that side and on this side the free world. The Russians and the Americans, no one else. What are we? Americans. Behind me there is the government, behind the government is NATO, behind NATO is the U.S. You can’t fight us, we are Americans.”{3}

And here’s Colin Powell at the 1996 Republican Convention: America is “a country where the best is always yet to come, a country that exists by divine providence.” He then punched his fist into the air and shouted out, “America!”{4}

Defenders of the American soldiers accused of abusing the prisoners in Iraq have been

insisting that the soldiers were only following orders. At the end of the Second World War, however, we read moral lectures to the German people on the inadmissibility of pleading that their participation in the holocaust was in obedience to their legitimate government. To prove that we were serious, we hanged the leading examples of such patriotic loyalty and imprisoned many of the rest.

Notes

1. Hans Christian Stroebele, Green Party member of the German parliament.
2. Knight Ridder newspapers, May 10, 2004
3. James Becket, Barbarism in Greece (New York, 1970), p.16. Becket was sent to Greece in December 1967 by Amnesty International.
4. The Economist (London), August 17, 1996, U.S. Edition

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