

Numerous Bush Administration officials committed crimes involving the torture of prisoners captured in the Middle East

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At least a score of high Bush Administration officials authorized, and hundreds of U.S. military and other government employees committed, crimes involving the torture of prisoners captured in the Middle East, published reports and legal documents indicate.

Indeed, any impartial probe of the widespread abuse of prisoners in U.S. custody could go well beyond the handful of prison guards who have been arrested and tried to date. The list would include top White House officials who designed the torture policies and Pentagon flag officers who executed them. It would include CIA officials and their contract pilots and immigration personnel involved in abducting suspects to be tortured as well as foreign officials who turned suspects over to U.S. authorities for torture. It would include doctors, nurses, and paramedics who abetted interrogators in torture and the civilian contractors of the Department of Defense(DOD) who tortured inmates.

In his May 8, 2004, radio broadcast, President Bush deplored “shocking conduct in Iraqi prisons by a small number of American servicemen and women.” But he added, “We will learn the facts, the extent of the abuse, and the identities of those involved. They will answer for their actions.” As that’s the case, let’s begin, starting at the top.

President Bush himself bears primary responsibility for torture for his arbitrary February 8, 2002, suspension of the Geneva Conventions that protect prisoners. This action set the tone for the prison scandals that shocked the conscience of the world with the publication in 2004 of the bizarre prisoner abuse photographs from Abu Ghraib near Baghdad .

As for Vice President Dick Cheney, he’s been described by retired Army Colonel Larry Wilkerson, Secretary of State Colin Powell’s chief of staff, as the man who provided “the philosophical guidance that led to the torture of detainees.” Wilkerson, who quit the State Department in January, 2005, said he didn’t fault Cheney for wishing to keep America safe “but he’ll corrupt the whole country to save it.”

Former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, and his former Undersecretary Paul Wolfowitz, both authorized torture practices. When Bush nominated Wolfowitz as World Bank boss, Legislative Counsel Christopher Anders of the American Civil Liberties Union lamented, “As privates and sergeants are getting jail time, top level officials are getting promoted.” Human Rights First(HRF) has charged Rumsfeld with direct responsibility for torture. And the Center for Constitutional Rights(CCR) named Rumsfeld one of 10 defendants in a criminal complaint filed in Karlsruhe , Germany, for brutal acts of torture at Abu Ghraib.

CCR Vice President Peter Weiss said CCR filed its complaint in Germany “because there is simply no other place to go” as USA refuses to join the International Criminal Court, and Iraq has no authority to prosecute. Under the doctrine of universal jurisdiction suspected war criminals may be prosecuted anywhere.

Apparently, Rumsfeld did not put the military on the torture track without internal opposition. Then U.S. Navy General Counsel Alberto Mora, now retired, put up a diligent fight, according author Jane Mayer of The New Yorker. On December 2, 2002, Rumsfeld formally okayed coercive punishments such as “hooding,” “stress positions,” “exploitation of phobias,” “deprivation of light and auditory stimuli” and other tactics long forbidden by the Army Field Manual, Mayer wrote.

One torture victim was Saudi detainee Mohammed al-Qahtani, a terrorist suspect arrested in Afghanistan in connection with the 9/11 skyjackings. According to Mayer, he was stripped and shaved, put in an isolation pen under artificial lights for 160 days, kept in a cold room, interrogated for up to 20 hours at a stretch, deprived of sleep, straddled by female guards, forced to wear a bra and women’s underwear on his head, put on a leash and threatened by dogs, taunted that his mother was a whore, and forced to listen to blaring pop music.

It was Rumsfeld who appointed Dr. Stephen Cambone, the Defense Undersecretary who gave the orders to “soften up” Iraqi prisoners. Cambone told Major General Geoffrey Miller, former Guantanamo commandant, to go to Iraq to “Gitmo-ize” the interrogation process. Miller reportedly said, “You have to treat them like dogs” and okayed use of stress positions “for agonizing lengths of time,” according to reporter Seymour Hersh. Cambone is named in the CCR complaint for his role in “creating a secret operation program whose mandate included committing war crimes.”

One form of torture begins with “extraordinary rendition.” Alleged terror suspects have been abducted by the CIA and flown to be tortured (and/or murdered) in Egypt , Saudi Arabia , Syria , Morocco , Jordan and Uzbekistan , etc. The practice was begun around 1996 under President Clinton and vastly expanded by President Bush after 9/11. Sandy Berger, Clinton ‘s National Security Council director, and counterterrorism boss Richard Clarke, have been identified as having approved extreme rendition. Clinton , of course, is also culpable. Right now, Italy would like to lay its hands on 22 C.I.A. agents who three years ago abducted Milan resident cleric Hassan Osama Nasr for torture in Egypt .

CIA pilots involved in extraordinary rendition flights, as well as their boss, former CIA Director Porter Goss and CIA ex-counter-terrorism chief Cofer Black should be called to account. Recall Goss asked Congress to exempt CIA operatives from any law banning torture and Black told Congress, “After 9/11, the gloves came off.” Any European officials who transferred suspects to the CIA are culpable.

One human rights consortium said last April it has documented the involvement of over 600 U.S. military and civilian personnel for the abuse and torture of 460 detainees.

A spokesman the Detainee Abuse and Accountability Project, Professor Meg Satterthwaite of NYU Law School, said “detainee abuses were widespread, and few people have truly been brought to justice.” Added Tom Malinowski, of Human Rights Watch, one of the participating groups, “We’ve seen a series of half-hearted investigations and slaps on the wrist.”

As ex-President Carter writes in “Our Endangered Values”(Simon & Schuster) the

“superficial investigations” into torture conducted by the Pentagon “have made it obvious that no high-level military officers or government officials will be held accountable...”

USA may be holding 11,000 prisoners in Iraq , Afghanistan , and at Guantanamo , Cuba , Human Rights First says. So far, more than 100 prisoners are said to have perished in U.S. custody. Captives include 800 Pakistani boys aged 13-15, some of them tortured, the International Red Cross has charged.

A key architect of the “new paradigm” torture policy is ex-White House legal counsel Alberto Gonzales, now Attorney General, author of a torture memo in January of 2002. He dismissed the Geneva Conventions banning torture as “quaint.”

His predecessor, Attorney General John Ashcroft, told Bush the Conventions outlawing torture did not apply to Taliban detainees. The CCR sued Ashcroft on behalf of Canadian citizen Maher Arar, who was abducted to Syria and tortured. Immigration and Naturalization Service(INS) and FBI agents who arrested Arar at JFK Airport and put him on a plane to Syria are culpable.

In addition to Ashcroft, the CCR suit cited Larry Thompson, Acting Attorney General said to have signed the rendition order; FBI Director Robert Mueller; J. Scott Blackman, regional INS director; Edward McElroy, then INS director for the New York City district; and INS Commissioner James Zigler.

High Bush aides responsible for torture include Assistant Attorney General Jay Bybee, who on August 1, 2002, drafted what became known as the “torture memo.” Also, Homeland Security chief Michael Chertoff who, when head of Justice’s criminal division, advised the CIA it was okay to use water torture.

Other law violators include John Yoo, now a University of California professor, who advised Bush the Geneva Conventions did not apply to detainees; Jack Goldsmith, who drafted the torture policy for Gonzales when he headed Justice’s Office of Legal Counsel; David Addington, Cheney’s top lawyer and a principle author of a White House memo justifying torture of terrorism suspects; Douglas Feith, former Undersecretary of Defense for Policy who had oversight for Abu Ghraib and like prisons; and former Pentagon general counsel William Haynes II, author of memos rationalizing torture.

That such policy memos were translated into action was established by Human Rights Watch, which reported prison interrogators in the Baghdad area got a lecture from military lawyers saying Geneva Conventions did not apply and torturing was legit.

Among military officers involved in torture are:

Lt. General Ricardo Sanchez, U.S. senior commander in Iraq for about a year starting in June, 2003. His memo of September 14, 2003, authorized use of interrogation techniques such as dogs, isolation, and stress positions. Major General Walter Wojdakowski was his deputy commander in charge of an involved military intelligence brigade and is one of those named in the CCR criminal complaint. And Major General Barbara Fast, cleared by the Army of any wrongdoing, served as chief of intelligence for Sanchez.

Colonel Thomas Pappas, head of the 205th Military Intelligence Brigade, was in charge of Iraq prisons and therefore responsible for what took place. He is also named in the CCR suit for torture “amounting to war crimes.” Lieutenant Colonel Steve Jordan, of 205th Military

Intelligence Brigade, is said by CCR to even have witnessed one detainee's death caused by his subordinates' mistreatment.

Brigadier General Janis Karpinski, with direct charge for Abu Ghraib and subsequently demoted to colonel, admitted to violation of the Geneva Conventions by holding so-called "ghost detainees" in secret. Sanchez, Pappas, and Karpinski are named in an ACLU complaint. Also, Captain Carolyn Wood, who oversaw interrogation at Bagram prison and approved the use of dogs and stress positions.

Lt. General William Boykin reportedly advised Cambone to use water torture and to humiliate captives via religious taunting. Participating doctors, nurses, and paramedics who aided torturers at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere would be culpable as well.

Air Force General Counsel Mary Walker, who headed a Rumsfeld working group on interrogation guidelines, rationalized that some criminal conduct was "not unlawful."

Lt. Colonel Stephen Jordan, former supervisor of interrogators at Abu Ghraib was named in the CCR complaint as having "clear knowledge" of ongoing abuses, and Lt. Colonel Jerry Phillabaum, commander of a military police battalion that oversaw Abu Ghraib was said by CCR to have failed to report war crimes.

CCR also filed a class action suit in Federal court against Titan Corp. of San Diego and CACI International of Arlington, Va., and three of their employees, Stephen Stefanowicz and John Israel of CACI, and Adel Nahkla of Titan for abuses Abu Ghraib. Plaintiffs said they were hooded and raped, stripped naked and urinated on, prevented from praying, beaten with chains and boots, and forced to watch their father tortured to death. CACI has strongly denied the charges.

Title 18 of the U.S. Code makes it a crime for an American to commit torture "outside the United States " and authorizes fines and prison terms of up to 20 years. If deaths result, those convicted may be jailed for life or executed. HRF has charged as of April, 2005, 108 foreign detainees had died in U.S. custody.

CCR President Michael Ratner said, "the existence of 'torture memos' drafted by administration officials and the authorization of techniques that violated humanitarian law by Secretary Rumsfeld, Lt. General Sanchez and others make clear that responsibility for Abu Ghraib and other violations of law reaches all the way to the top."

Calling for an investigation, Amnesty International's Jumana Musa, warned, "Torture thrives on impunity. By not holding accountable the people who drafted and implemented the policies, the US government is giving a wink and a nod to torturers world wide."

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