

President Carter: Many Children Were Tortured Under Bush

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While congress says it is gearing up to investigate what is old news, that CIA and Special Ops forces are killing Al Qaeda leaders, a decision of far different gravity is being contemplated by Attorney General Eric Holder. The new insistence of Congress on its oversight role, conspicuously absent throughout 8 years of Bush, is suddenly rearing its head in the form of questioning a policy which has been in place with no controversy for years. The U.S. has been hunting and killing Al Qaeda leaders outside of official war zones since 2004, when the New York Times reported that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld had signed an order authorizing Special Forces to kill Al Qaeda where they found them.

As recently as September 2008 CBS reported that Special Forces struck Qaeda leadership in Pakistan.

The decision faced by Holder, whether or not to appoint a Special Prosecutor on torture, is of a different gravity altogether. A weight of evidence keeps building which indicates torture was employed on innocent men, that it didn't work, and that it didn't prevent any attacks. And it gets worse. Bush's own FBI Director Robert Mueller recently confirmed to the New York Times what he told Vanity Fair a year ago, that "to [his] knowledge" torture didn't prevent a single attack. Former Legendary CIA Director William Colby has said that torture is "ineffective."

Harper's Magazine's Scott Horton now suggests there are two Eric Holders at war with each other: Holder the good soldier who knows well the preference of his boss for prosecutions to not take place, and Holder the servant of the law who is aware that what he does now may determine what is likely to happen again.

It is becoming clear that such an investigation, if it happens, will not stop with a few low-ranking scapegoats. Horton notes:

"President Obama's assurance to CIA officials who relied on the opinions of government lawyers in implementing these programs, an assurance that Holder himself repeated, would have to be worked in. That suggests that the focus would likely be on the lawyers and policymakers who authorized use of the new techniques."

And CIA whistleblower Ray McGovern writes this week:

the buck stops - actually, in this case, it began - with President Bush. Senate Armed Services Committee leaders Carl Levin and John McCain on Dec. 11, 2008, released the executive summary of a report, approved by the full committee without dissent, concluding that Bush's Feb. 7, 2002, memorandum

“opened the door to considering aggressive techniques.”

What changed with Holder? Horton writes in “The Torture Prosecution Turnaround?”:

Holder began his review mindful of the clear preference of President Obama’s two key political advisers—David Axelrod and Rahm Emanuel—that there be no investigation. Axelrod and Emanuel are described as uninterested in either the legal or policy merits of the issue of a criminal investigation. Their concerns turn entirely on their political analysis...Holder initially appeared prepared to satisfy their wishes.

This attitude seemed to change after Obama’s speech at the CIA, when Emanuel and Axelrod moved out front to say there would be no prosecutions. According to Horton:

“In the days after Obama’s speech at the CIA, both Axelrod and Emanuel insisted that the White House had made the decision that there would be no prosecutions. According to reliable sources, that incensed Holder, who felt that the remarks had compromised the integrity both of the White House and Justice Department by suggesting that political advisers made the call on who would or would not be criminally investigated.”

To make things worse for the Bush administration, evidence is emerging that they can no longer even rely on exhibit A and B of the Torture Works theory, Al Zabudaya and Kalid Shiek Mohammed, the latter of whom is still confessing to everything short of being the real Boston Strangler. I guess if I’d been waterboarded 82 times I’d be babbling too. The FBI Special Agent who interrogated Abu Zubayda, recently breaking a 7-year silence after reading the “torture memos,” wrote in the New York Times:

“One of the most striking parts of the memos is the false premises on which they are based. The first, dated August 2002, grants authorization to use harsh interrogation techniques on a high-ranking terrorist, Abu Zubaydah, on the grounds that previous methods hadn’t been working. The next three memos cite the successes of those methods as a justification for their continued use.

It is inaccurate, however, to say that Abu Zubaydah had been uncooperative. Along with another F.B.I. agent, and with several C.I.A. officers present, I questioned him from March to June 2002, before the harsh techniques were introduced later in August. Under traditional interrogation methods, he provided us with important actionable intelligence...This experience fit what I had found throughout my counterterrorism career: traditional interrogation techniques are successful in identifying operatives, uncovering plots and saving lives.”

Then there is the political risk to the Obama administration that Axelrod and Emanuel have miscalculated, and that, in fact, the rest of the president’s agenda is hamstrung while a growing number of Americans call for existing laws to be enforced. What is haunting Americans could be, in Washington jargon, “sucking oxygen” out of the debate, and “moving forward” is a pipe dream until pending business is dealt with. Spontaneous and planned rallies calling for a Special Prosecutor are growing, not diminishing. In addition, the worse revelations may be yet to come in the horrifying saga of what happened when, as Major General Anthony Taguba says:

[a] permissive environment [was] created by implicit and explicit authorizations by senior US officials to “take the gloves off”...

President Jimmy Carter wrote that the Red Cross, Amnesty International and the Pentagon “have gathered substantial testimony of torture of children, confirmed by soldiers who witnessed or participated in the abuse.” In “Our Endangered Values” Carter said that the Red Cross found after visiting six U.S. prisons “107 detainees under eighteen, some as young as eight years old.” And reporter Hersh, (who broke the Abu Ghraib torture scandal,) reported 800-900 Pakistani boys aged 13 to 15 in custody.

Journalist Seymour Hersh’s (who broke the Abu Ghraib scandal) bombshell before the ACLU some years ago has been in a temporary slumber, as there is question as to whether the videotapes in possession of the Pentagon were among those claimed to be destroyed. Destroyed or not, there is still the conscience of soldiers and agents who bore witness to contend with, as the reign of political terror against whistleblowers which characterized the Bush administration subsides. Hersh said:

” Some of the worst things that happened you don’t know about, okay? Videos, um, there are women there. Some of you may have read that they were passing letters out, communications out to their men. This is at Abu Ghraib ... The women were passing messages out saying ‘Please come and kill me, because of what’s happened’ and basically what happened is that those women who were arrested with young boys, children in cases that have been recorded. The boys were sodomized with the cameras rolling. And the worst above all of that is the soundtrack of the boys shrieking that your government has. They are in total terror. It’s going to come out.”

Republican Senator Lindsey Graham said at the time:

“The American public needs to understand, we’re talking about rape and murder here. We’re not just talking about giving people a humiliating experience. We’re talking about rape and murder and some very serious charges.”

History is just beginning to sort out the Bush era, with stubborn facts showing a resilience that Fox News talking points cannot, and more emerging. Today, even among Republicans, it is difficult to find those who will embrace Richard Nixon, though for a while he was every bit the perceived victim of “left-wing hate” that Bush and Cheney are now. Incredibly, to compare Nixon to Bush-Cheney is to do a deeply flawed man a disservice. Nixon inherited Vietnam. He did not orchestrate from whole cloth a campaign to link Saddam with 9/11, and strenuously push to war despite the objections of his countrymen and the world. Nixon spied on political enemies. He did not use a tragedy to illegally spy on millions, the true numbers of which we still do not know because congress has never investigated.

It’s almost possible to feel sorry for the shifty, friendless Nixon. It is less possible to feel so for the smirking Bush, who thought nothing of telling soldier’s families that war critics were saying that their loved ones “had died in vain.”

A compilation in November 2008 of other evidence of alleged incidents involving children at the time recounts:

— Iraqi lawyer Sahar Yasiri, representing the Federation of Prisoners and Political Prisoners, said in a published interview there are more than 400,000 detainees in Iraq being held in 36 prisons and camps and that 95 percent of the 10,000 women among them have been raped. Children, he said, “suffer from torture, rape, (and) starvation” and do not know why they have been arrested. He added the children have been victims of “random” arrests “not based on any legal text.”

— Former prisoner Thaar Salman Dawod in a witness statement said, “[I saw] two boys naked and they were cuffed together face to face and [a U.S. soldier] was beating them and a group of guards were watching and taking pictures and there was three female soldiers laughing at the prisoners.”

— Iraqi TV reporter, Suhaib Badr-Addin al-Baz, arrested while making a documentary and thrown into Abu Ghraib for 74 days, told Mackay he saw “hundreds” of children there. Al-Baz said he heard one 12-year-old girl crying, “They have undressed me. They have poured water over me.” He said he heard her whimpering daily.

— Al-Baz also told of a 15-year-old boy “who was soaked repeatedly with hoses until he collapsed.” Amnesty International said ex-detainees reported boys as young as 10 are held at Abu Ghraib.

— German TV reporter Thomas Reutter of “Report Mainz” quoted U.S. Army Sgt. Samuel Provance that interrogation specialists “poured water” over one 16-year-old Iraqi boy, drove him throughout a cold night, “smeared him with mud” and then showed him to his father, who was also in custody. Apparently, one tactic employed by the Bush regime is to elicit confessions from adults by dragging their abused children in front of them.

— Jonathan Steele, wrote in the British “The Guardian” that “Hundreds of children, some as young as nine, are being held in appalling conditions in Baghdad’s prisons...Sixteen-year-old Omar Ali told the “Guardian” he spent more than three years at Karkh juvenile prison sleeping with 75 boys to a cell that is just five by 10 meters, some of them on the floor. Omar told the paper guards often take boys to a separate room in the prison and rape them.

— Raad Jamal, age 17, was taken from his Doura home by U.S. troops and turned over to the Iraqi Army’s Second regiment where Jamal said he was hung from the ceiling by ropes and beaten with electric cables.

— Human Rights Watch (HRW) last June put the number of juveniles detained at 513. In all, HRW estimates, since 2003, the U.S. has detained 2,400 children in Iraq, some as young as ten.

— IRIN, the humanitarian news service, last year quoted Khalid Rabia of the Iraqi NGO Prisoners’ Association for Justice(PAJ), stating that five boys between 13 and 17 accused of supporting insurgents and detained by the Iraqi army “showed signs of torture all over their bodies,” such as “cigarette burns over their legs,” she said.

— One boy of 13 arrested in Afghanistan in 2002 was held in solitary for more than a year at Bagram and Guantanamo and made to stand in stress position and deprived of sleep, according to the “Catholic Worker.”

Attorney General Holder is a man of conscience who now serves both President Obama and the law. A Newsweek piece last week says he has no illusions that:

Such a decision [to appoint a Special Prosecutor] would roil the country, would likely plunge Washington into a new round of partisan warfare, and could even imperil Obama's domestic priorities, including health care and energy reform. Holder knows all this, and he has been wrestling with the question for months. "I hope that whatever decision I make would not have a negative impact on the president's agenda," he says. "But that can't be a part of my decision."

There can be redemption for a nation which faces its past. One that does not can only become more monstrous.

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