

Psychologists Collaborated with “War on Terror” Torture Program

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Newly declassified documents obtained by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) from the Department of Defense (DoD) expose the role played by psychologists in the illegal interrogation of prisoners at CIA and Pentagon detention facilities in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

According to ACLU staff attorney **Amrit Singh**,

“The documents reveal that psychologists and medical personnel played a key role in sustaining prisoner abuse — a clear violation of their ethical and legal obligations. The documents only underscore the need for an independent investigation into responsibility for the systemic abuse of detainees held in U.S. custody abroad.” (“Newly Unredacted Report Confirms Psychologists Supported Illegal Interrogations in Iraq and Afghanistan,” ACLU, Press Release, April 30, 2008)

In 2006, the civil liberties group received a highly redacted version of the Church Report, commissioned by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. Written by Vice Admiral Albert T. Church, the report was to serve as a “comprehensive review” of military interrogation operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Guantánamo Bay.

A cover-up the moment it saw the light of day, the Church Report refused to address relevant issues of command responsibility for prisoner abuse and torture at U.S. military detention facilities and CIA “black sites,” claiming such questions were “beyond its mandate.”

Official failure to issue legal interrogation guidelines for the humane treatment of prisoners by American military forces and mercenary contractors in their employ were euphemistically labeled “a missed opportunity.”

But as we now know, under the torture regime given legal sanction by the Bush administration, as **ABC News** reported in April, medicalized torture by military psychologists operating in U.S. dungeons was both a ubiquitous and banal aspect of the “war on terror.” According to the **Church Report** whitewash, military psychologists:

...analogous to the [Behavioral Science Consultation Teams] BSCT in Guantánamo Bay, the Army has a number of psychologists in operational

positions (in both Afghanistan and Iraq), mostly within Special Operations, where they provide direct support to military operations. **They do not function as mental health providers**, and one of their core missions is to support interrogations. [emphasis added]

Indeed, BSCT operatives at America's premier gulag, Guantánamo Bay, "reversed-engineered" Special Operations Command's Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape (SERE) program as a means to destroy a prisoners' will to resist his captors demands to "confess" to all manner of "plots," however far-fetched, against the U.S. "homeland."

Following a script written during the CIA's MKULTRA "mind control" days, the **KUBARK Counterintelligence Manual**, vicious techniques of isolation, sensory deprivation, sexual and cultural humiliation, waterboarding, etc. were viciously applied by behavioral "specialists."

As psychoanalyst **Stephen Soldz** wrote last year, citing the DoD's August 2006 report from the **Office of the Inspector General**,

All evidence is that these SERE techniques continued to be used, with active participation of the BSCT psychologists. For example, it is well documented (see the interrogation log) that the chair of the Guantánamo BSCT team, psychologist Major John Leso participated in the abusive interrogation (a.k.a. torture) of prisoner 063, Mohammed al-Qahtani. A July 14, 2004 memo from the FBI to the Army Criminal Investigation Command documents the effects of this interrogation on al-Qatani:

"In September or October of 2002 FBI agents observed that a canine was used in an aggressive manner to intimidate detainee — after he had been subjected to intense isolation for over three months. During that time period, ... was totally isolated (with the exception of occasional interrogations) in a cell that was always flooded with light. By late November, the detainee was evidencing behavior consistent with extreme psychological trauma (talking to non-existent people, reporting hearing voices, crouching in the corner of a cell covered with a sheet for hours on end). It is unknown to the FBI whether such extended isolation was approved by DoD authorities." ...

With the release of the OIG's report, it is now irrefutable that both SERE psychologists and Guantánamo BSCT psychologists were involved in the development of these forms of interrogation abuse, forms of interrogation that clearly constitute psychological torture and were illegal under the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and various US laws until the 2006 Military Commissions Act granted immunity to those who had previously broken these laws during the "Global War On Terror." (Stephen Soldz, "Shrinks and the SERE Technique at Guantánamo," CounterPunch, May 29, 2007)

The ACLU's latest tranche of documents also reveal that Army medics routinely failed to report the abuse of prisoners in Iraq. According to the ACLU, citing the Church Report,

"enlisted medics witnessed obvious episodes of detainee abuse apparently without reporting them to superiors." One episode involved a detainee whose wounded leg was intentionally hit. Two others involved detainees handcuffed uncomfortably to beds for prolonged periods, such that one eventually suffered a dislocated shoulder and another experienced excruciating pain when eventually forced to stand. Another incident involved a medic who witnessed

pictures of naked detainees in a pyramid but did not report the episode to superiors.

Grimly, the report found that in three separate instances between November and June 2003, three detainees were in all probability murdered by U.S. forces: at Abu Ghraib a prisoner died due to “compromised respiration”; a prisoner at Forward Operating Base Tiger in Iraq, “died of asphyxia during interrogation”; while a third detainee in Al Nasiriyah died of strangulation. His ribs and neck bones had been broken. The Church Report avers: “the investigation suggests he was beaten and then dragged by the neck by a guard.”

But in the post-Constitutional bizarro world of Bushist “homeland security,” guilt, innocence, or for that matter the security of the American people, are of no consequence. What is important however, for the masters of the American deep state, is “keeping the rabble in line” by regular injections of psychological terror dispensed by administration skills and their “message force multipliers,” the corporate media.

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