

Torture and the CIA

By [Serendepity](#)

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [US NATO War Agenda](#)

Torture has been in the news quite a bit lately. Many (perhaps most) Americans first heard that U.S. soldiers tortured prisoners when the Abu Ghraib scandal broke (in April 2004). Of course, U.S. operatives have been torturing prisoners for decades. There's even a course in it, which is taught at the US Army School of Americas (now renamed the "Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation") in Fort Benning, GA.

In late 2005 another scandal emerged, this one to do with the CIA's secret prisons in Europe and elsewhere, and the CIA's practice of "rendition", which means abducting people and flying them to countries where they can be interrogated without having to worry about whether any US law is being broken. Just one example of this is the case of Abu Omar, who was picked up off the street in Milan and flown (via Germany) to Egypt, where he was held for fourteen months and tortured (see [Italy Charges CIA Agents](#)).

When Condoleezza Rice visited Germany in early December 2005 she faced a barrage of questions concerning the CIA's practice of rendition and whether there were CIA-run secret prisons in Europe (she did not deny that there were). The publicity prompted a poll by Associated Press / Ipsos which found that "In America, 61 percent of those surveyed agreed torture is justified at least on rare occasions." ([UK Guardian](#)) (One has to wonder how they framed the question, since there's a big difference between "justified" and "justified on rare occasions".)

Hardly any Americans, however, are aware that not only do U.S. operatives occasionally torture "terrorist suspects" but that in many cases they torture them to death. The failure of the U.S. media to make any mention of this is the subject of an article by Peter Phillips, [Hard Evidence of US Torturing Prisoners to Death Ignored by Corporate Media](#).

Phillips refers to [a report by the ACLU](#) which quotes forty-four US military autopsy reports. Phillips asks: "How can the American public understand the gravity of the torture that is currently being committed in our name when the issue is being reported with no reference to the extent to which these crimes against humanity have gone?"

As a contribution to informing the American public as to what torture really means, we reproduce here a few of the autopsy reports. Remember that these deaths resulting from torture were produced by U.S. operatives, acting under the orders of commanding officers, who were implementing a policy which has its origins at the highest levels within the U.S. Department of Defense. These autopsy reports are not for people just brought in dead from the street — they are for people who died while in U.S. custody.

6/6/2003 Whitehorse Detainment Facility, Nasiriyah, Iraq

Strangulation Died as a result of asphyxia (lack of oxygen to the brain) due to strangulation as evidenced by the recently fractured hyoid bone in the neck and soft tissue hemorrhage extending downward to the level of the right thyroid cartilage. Autopsy revealed bone fracture, rib fractures, contusions in mid abdomen, back and buttocks extending to the left flank, abrasions, lateral buttocks. Contusions, back of legs and knees; abrasions on knees, left fingers and encircling to left wrist. Lacerations and superficial cuts, right 4th and 5th fingers. Also, blunt force injuries, predominately recent contusions (bruises) on the torso and lower extremities. Abrasions on left wrist are consistent with use of restraints. No evidence of defense injuries or natural disease. Manner of death is homicide.

12/10/2002 Bagram Collection Point Blunt force injuries to lower extremities complicating coronary artery disease.

Detainee was found unresponsive restrained in his cell. Death was due to blunt force injuries to lower extremities complicating coronary artery disease. Contusions and abrasions on forehead, nose, head, behind ear, neck, abdomen, buttock, elbow, thigh, knee, foot, toe, hemorrhage on rib area and leg. Detainee died of blunt force injuries to lower extremities, complicating underlying coronary artery disease. The blunt force injuries to the legs resulted in extensive muscle damage, muscle necrosis and rhabdomyolysis. Electrolyte disturbances primarily hyperkalemia (elevated blood potassium level) and metabolic acidosis can occur within hours of muscle damage. Massive sodium and water shifts occur, resulting in hypovolemic shock and vasodilation and later, acute renal failure. The decedent's underlying coronary artery disease would compromise his ability to tolerate the electrolyte and fluid abnormalities, and his underlying malnutrition and likely dehydration would further exacerbate the effects of the muscle damage. The manner of death is homicide.

Abu Ghraib Blunt Force Injuries Complicated by Compromised Respiration Iraqi National male was captured by Navy Seal Team #7 and resisted apprehension.

External injuries including multiple contusions are consistent with injuries sustained during apprehension. Fractures of the ribs and a contusion of the left lung imply significant blunt force injuries of the thorax and likely resulted in impaired respiration. Ligation marks of the wrists and ankles. Remote gunshot wound of torso. No significant natural diseases identified. According to investigating agents, during interrogation of the detainee, a hood made of synthetic material was placed over the head and neck of the detainee. He died while detained at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Cause of death: Blunt force injuries complicated by compromised respiration. Manner of Death: Homicide. DOD 003329 refers to this case as "1 blunt force trauma and choking; died during interrogation." DOD 003325 refers to this case with the notation "Q[uestioned] by OGA [Other Governmental Agency — non-military, often refers to the CIA] and NSWT [Navy Seals] died during interrogation."

1/9/2004 Al Asad, Iraq Blunt force injuries and asphyxia 47 year old white male detainee died while in US custody.

Cause of death: Blunt Force Injuries and Asphyxia; Manner of Death: Homicide. Autopsy revealed deep bruising of the chest wall, numerous displaced rib fractures, bruising on the lungs, hemorrhage into the mesentery of the small and large intestine. Examination of the neck structures revealed hemorrhage into the strap muscles and fractures of the thyroid cartilage and hyoid bone. History of asphyxia, secondary to occlusion of the oral airway. Pleural and pulmonary adhesions. Hypertensive cardiovascular disease. According to report

provided by the US army CID, the detainee was shackled to the top of a doorframe with a gag in his mouth at the time he lost consciousness and became pulseless. The severe blunt force injuries, the hanging position, and the obstruction of the oral cavity with a gag contributed to this individual's death. DOD 00329 refers to this case as "gagged in standing restraint" DOD 003329 refers to this case as "1 blunt force trauma and choking; gagged in standing restraint." DOD 003324 refers to this case with a note indicating "Q[uestioned] by OGA [Other Governmental Agency — non-military, often refers to CIA], gagged in standing restraint."

These are cases where torture resulted in death. Probably most cases of torture by U.S. operatives don't result in death and don't give rise to autopsy reports such as these, so we don't hear about them. But we can conclude that it is standard practice to beat prisoners almost to death. In some cases it seems that homicide was intended. It was standard practice among the Romans to break the legs of people who were crucified, but who were lingering on for too long. This results in the fatal damage described in one of the autopsy reports given above:

The blunt force injuries to the legs resulted in extensive muscle damage, muscle necrosis and rhabdomyolysis. Electrolyte disturbances primarily hyperkalemia (elevated blood potassium level) and metabolic acidosis can occur within hours of muscle damage. Massive sodium and water shifts occur, resulting in hypovolemic shock and vasodilatation and later, acute renal failure.

It is unlikely that anyone would inflict such damage to the legs of a prisoner without intending to kill them.

The people who torture prisoners in this way do not deserve to be called human. To describe them as "animals" would be an insult to animals. The best word to describe them is "evil". And the same is true of those who order subordinates to torture prisoners. The U.S. policy of torture was not ordered by low-level military officials. It comes from the top.

The Bush administration and its defenders have chiefly sought to limit a public relations disaster — the dissemination of [the photographs](#) [of Abu Ghraib] — rather than deal with the complex crimes of leadership and of policy revealed by the pictures. There was, first of all, the displacement of the reality onto the photographs themselves. The administration's initial response was to say that the president was shocked and disgusted by the photographs — as if the fault or horror lay in the images, not in what they depict. There was also the avoidance of the word torture. The prisoners had possibly been the objects of "abuse," eventually of "humiliation" — that was the most to be admitted. "My impression is that what has been charged thus far is abuse, which I believe technically is different from torture," Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld said at a press conference. "And therefore I'm not going to address the torture word." ...

[The] Bush administration [asserts] ... that the United States has embarked on an endless war (against a protean enemy called "terrorism"), and that those detained in this war are, if the president so decides, "unlawful combatants" — a policy enunciated by Donald Rumsfeld as early as January 2002 — and therefore, as Rumsfeld said, "technically" they "do not have any rights" under the Geneva Convention, and [so] you have a perfect recipe for the cruelties and crimes committed against the thousands incarcerated without charges and access to lawyers in American-run prisons that have been set up since the attack of September 11th, 2001. ...

[In reference to the Abu Ghraib photos,] “There are a lot more photographs and videos that exist,” Mr. Rumsfeld acknowledged in his testimony. “If these are released to the public, obviously, it is going to make matters worse.” Worse for the administration and its programs, presumably, not for those who are the actual and potential victims of torture.

— Susan Sontag, [What Have We Done?](#)

The U.S. administration, and U.S. law, has a different definition of “torture” than the rest of the human race. When Condoleezza Rice (lying through her teeth) says that the U.S. does not practice “torture” she bases her assertion on a conception of torture as actions which lead to irreparable organ damage or death. But the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (1984, signed and ratified by the U.S., but with so many [reservations](#) that its ratification is merely a deceptive show) defines torture as follows:

For the purposes of this Convention, the term “torture” means any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity.

This definition of torture as the intentional infliction of severe physical or mental pain or suffering accords with the generally accepted definition, such as we find in Webster’s Dictionary: “The infliction of intense pain (as from burning, crushing, or wounding) to punish, coerce, or afford sadistic pleasure.” But the topmost officials in the Bush Administration believe that they can use words to mean whatever they wish them to mean, or even invent new terms entirely (e.g., “illegal combatant”) and to draw whatever conclusions they wish from the use of these invented terms (e.g., “illegal combatants have no legal rights”). This would simply be perverse if it did not lead to an attempt to justify evil by means of linguistic sleight-of-hand.

There can be no justification for torture. Period. That is because the use of torture degrades the torturer to the level where he no longer deserves to be regarded as a human being. Or if one wishes to be generous, no longer deserves to be regarded as a human being except as one who is depraved, mentally ill, or has lost all conception of the minimal standards required to be acknowledged as a human. Those who practice, order, support or condone torture are a disgrace to the human species. Unfortunately such people now run the U.S. government, which is one reason why the U.S.A. has become one of the two most-hated countries in the world, a world it seeks to dominate by war, the threat of war, and the impoverishment of all who are not part of its ruling elite.

- [Germany’s victim of extraordinary rendition sues in US courts as Rice is forced on defensive](#)

On 31 December 2003 as Mr Masri waited to clear immigration in Macedonia, the border police notified the local CIA station which contacted the agency's headquarters in Langley, Virginia.

This week it was revealed that the head of the CIA's counter-terrorism unit had ordered Mr Masri's "extraordinary rendition" because she "had a hunch" he was involved in terrorist activities ...

During his incarceration, Mr Masri says he was repeatedly beaten ... [and 37 days into a hunger strike] guards beat him and force-fed him with a tube down his throat.

A copy of the entire *Serendipity* website is available on CD-ROM. Details [here](#).

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