
WHAT NOT TO DO WHEN YOU GET UP IN THE MORNING RUMSFELD

THE HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH REPORT 'THE ROAD TO ABU GHRAIB'

In the aftermath of 9/11 Cofer Black, a former director of the CIA's counter-terrorist unit, stated to Congress, "There was a before 9/11 and an after 9/11. After 9/11 the gloves came off." A new report released by Human Rights Watch this month, claims that the abuses in Abu Ghraib prison and elsewhere in Iraq are the culmination of a concerted policy, post 9/11, to undermine and circumvent international law. The roots of this policy, the report argues, can be found in the treatment of Taliban prisoners in Afghanistan and detainees in Guantanamo bay. Both are instances of the US administration ignoring and circumventing the Geneva Convention and international law against the use of torture.



US soldiers have been using 'Stress & Duress' tactics. (That's torture to the rest of us).

The report counters directly US and British claims that instances of abuse in Iraq are isolated and exceptional. In April of this year the first photographs of human rights abuses in Iraq appeared, and the US claimed they were the 'exceptional' and 'isolated' work of a few 'bad apples'. George W Bush referred to the "disgraceful conduct by a few American troops..." The HRW report points out that in fact widespread abuses had already been occurring in the Guantanamo camps and in Afghanistan, with reports of these as early as 2002. Many testified to sleep and sensory deprivation, beatings, and experience of some levels of torture, or 'stress and duress' techniques as the administration likes to call them.

The report claims that the abuse which subsequently took place in Abu Ghraib was a consequence of these earlier policies of circumvention and denial. It states: "This pattern of abuse did not result from the acts of individual soldiers who broke the rules. It resulted from decisions made by the Bush administration to bend, ignore or cast rules aside. Administration policies created the climate for Abu Ghraib."

The HRW report claims that the US administration created the pattern of abuse in three main ways. Firstly, there were the undeniable attempts to circumvent international law. The US believed the gloves were off post 9/11, and that winning the war on terror rendered obsolete the legal restrictions previously imposed.

The report states in its introduction that "the Bush administration apparently believed that the new wars it was fighting could not be won if it was constrained by 'old rules'. The disturbing information coming to light points to an official policy of torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment." Secondly, the removal of legal process through the setting up of camps at 'off shore', 'off limits' undisclosed locations allowed the US to use illegal 'stress and duress' techniques with no fear of reprimand. Thirdly, the Bush administration took a 'hear no evil, see no evil' approach to human rights abuses at all the locations. This is clear from the photographs taken in Abu Ghraib. The soldiers appear to be unconcerned at the prospect of being found out. The Bush administration actively attempted to prevent the ICRC from getting access when the reports of abuse were at their height in Afghanistan. In fact, virtually all attempts to make the administration take notice failed. This again emphasised to the soldiers (who had been told that the Geneva Convention did not apply) that what they were doing was justified and would be supported by their superiors.

The report claims that the severest of abuses in Iraq began to take place after Secretary Rumsfeld's decision to prioritise so called 'actionable intelligence'. The subsequent arrival in Iraq of military officials who were previously in charge of interrogation in Afghanistan and Guantanamo, implies a shift towards more aggressive methods of questioning. The Bush administration's false claim that the Geneva Convention did not apply in Guantanamo, as the suspects are regarded as 'unlawful combatants', is patently false. The Convention allows for protection to all involved in an international armed conflict, regardless of POW status. Perhaps even more worrying than the US administration's attempt to rewrite the Geneva Convention, is their complete disregard for the document. Rumsfeld, undermining the Geneva Convention on Feb 7th of this year, stated: "The reality is the set of facts that exist today with the Al-Queda and the Taliban were not necessarily the set of facts that were considered when the Geneva Convention was fashioned." Rumsfeld also remarked on a visit to Abu Ghraib: "Geneva doesn't say what you do when you get up in the morning."

This clear undermining of international law makes a mockery of US claims that abuse is the entire responsibility of rogue soldiers, or 'bad apples'. As the report clearly points out, the US administration has systematically undermined conventions on detainees, and has ordered the use of illegal interrogation methods. A memo issued to interrogators at Abu Ghraib on October 12th last year stated that Military Police and interrogators were to work together to "manipulate an internee's emotions and weaknesses." Orders like these make clear that soldiers were not acting simply out of a sadistic anger, but within a clear policy of abuse, ordered at the highest levels.

The way in which the press in this country has portrayed the abuses has been to highlight and demonise individual soldiers, not to attack the US administration. That stories of abuse had already been ignored by our 'free' press, and that it took soldiers themselves, blowing the