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New Report on Torture, Extraordinary Rendition

By John Glaser

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A meticulously documented report ^[1] on post-9/11 torture and interrogation from The Constitution Project, a legal research and advocacy group, concludes that “it is indisputable that the United States engaged in the practice of torture” and that US officials in the highest echelons of government are the ones responsible for it.

“The sweeping, 577-page report says that while brutality has occurred in every American war, there never before had been ‘the kind of considered and detailed discussions that occurred after 9/11 directly involving a president and his top advisers on the wisdom, propriety and legality of inflicting pain and torment on some detainees in our custody,’” *The New York Times* ^[2] reports.

The report is comprehensive and is critical both of the Bush administration’s conduct and of the Obama administration’s, which blocked efforts to get a full account of the torture programs.

The full document can be read here ^[3], but I did want to point out one short excerpt as an example of how detailed and hard-hitting it is. In the context of extraordinary renditions, a program in which detainees would be sent to authoritarian governments to be tortured, the report reminds us of something that was reported long before but is worth making note of again:

[Egyptian army general] Omar Suleiman’s personal relationship with the United States was cited by DOS as “probably the most successful element of the [U.S.-Egypt] relationship.” 41 On one reported occasion, when the CIA “asked for a DNA sample from a relative of Al Qaeda leader Ayman Al-Zawahiri, Suleiman offered the man’s whole arm instead.”

Remember, Suleiman is the man that the Obama administration picked to succeed Mubarak ^[4] after popular protests unseated the long-standing US-backed dictator.

Note the lingering fallout from the post-9/11 history of torture: the Obama administration is at least indirectly responsible for ongoing torture of detainees in Afghanistan and currently has 166 prisoners in Gitmo serving indefinite detention – many of whom have been cleared for release and are starving themselves as a form of protest against their injustice. One reason for the massive expansion of the drone war under Bush’s successor is that detention and torture are too messy – so Obama has learned that killing them is the way to go.