

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

<http://www.counterpunch.org/2014/08/12/the-united-states-and-torture/print>

The United States and Torture We Tortured Some People and Probably Still Are...

by WILLIAM BLUM

AUGUST 12, 2014

Two of the things that governments tend to cover-up or lie about the most are assassinations and torture, both of which are widely looked upon as exceedingly immoral and unlawful, even uncivilized. Since the end of the Second World War the United States has attempted to assassinate more than 50 foreign leaders and has led the world in torture; not only the torture performed directly by Americans upon foreigners, but providing torture equipment, torture manuals, lists of people to be tortured, and in-person guidance and encouragement by American instructors, particularly in Latin America.

Thus it is somewhat to the credit of President Obama that at his August 1 press conference he declared “We did a whole lot of things that were right, but we tortured *some folks*. We did some things that were contrary to our values.”

And he actually used the word “torture” at that moment, not “enhanced interrogation”, which has been the euphemism of preference the past decade, although two minutes later the president used “extraordinary interrogation techniques”. And “tortured some folks” makes me wince. The man is clearly uncomfortable with the subject.

But all this is minor. Much more important is the fact that for several years Mr. Obama's supporters have credited him with having put an end to the practice of torture. And they simply have no right to make that claim.

Shortly after Obama's first inauguration, both he and Leon Panetta, the new Director of the CIA, explicitly stated that "rendition" was not being ended. As the *Los Angeles Times* reported at the time: "Under executive orders issued by Obama recently, the CIA still has authority to carry out what are known as renditions, secret abductions and transfers of prisoners to countries that cooperate with the United States."

The English translation of "cooperate" is "torture". Rendition is simply outsourcing torture. There was no other reason to take prisoners to Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Egypt, Jordan, Kenya, Somalia, Kosovo, or the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, to name some of the known torture centers frequented by the United States. Kosovo and Diego Garcia – both of which house large and very secretive American military bases – if not some of the other locations, may well still be open for torture business. The same for the Guantánamo Base in Cuba.

Moreover, the Executive Order referred to, number 13491, issued January 22, 2009, "Ensuring Lawful Interrogations", leaves a major loophole. It states repeatedly that humane treatment, including the absence of torture, is applicable only to prisoners detained in an "armed conflict". Thus, torture by Americans outside an environment of "armed conflict" is not explicitly prohibited. But what about torture within an environment of "counter-terrorism"?

The Executive Order required the CIA to use only the interrogation methods outlined in a revised *Army Field Manual*. However, using the *Army Field Manual* as a guide to prisoner treatment and interrogation still allows solitary confinement, perceptual or sensory deprivation, sensory overload, sleep deprivation, the induction of fear and hopelessness, mind-altering drugs, environmental manipulation such as temperature and noise, and stress positions.

After Panetta was questioned by a Senate panel, the *New York Times* wrote that he had "left open the possibility that the agency could seek permission to use interrogation methods more aggressive than the limited menu that President Obama authorized under new rules ... Mr. Panetta also said the agency would continue the Bush administration practice of 'rendition' – picking terrorism suspects off the street and sending them to a third country. But he said the agency would refuse to deliver a suspect into the hands of a country known for torture or other actions 'that violate our human values'."

The last sentence is of course childishly absurd. The countries chosen to receive rendition prisoners were chosen precisely because they were willing and able to torture them.

No official in the Bush and Obama administrations has been punished in any way for torture or other war crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and the other countries they waged illegal war against. And, it could be added, no American banker has been punished for their indispensable role in the world-wide financial torture they inflicted upon us all beginning in 2008. What a

marvelously forgiving land is America. This, however, does not apply to Julian Assange, Edward Snowden, or Chelsea Manning.

In the last days of the Bush White House, Michael Ratner, professor at Columbia Law School and former president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, pointed out:

The only way to prevent this from happening again is to make sure that those who were responsible for the torture program pay the price for it. I don't see how we regain our moral stature by allowing those who were intimately involved in the torture programs to simply walk off the stage and lead lives where they are not held accountable.

I'd like at this point to once again remind my dear readers of the words of the "Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment", which was drafted by the United Nations in 1984, came into force in 1987, and ratified by the United States in 1994. Article 2, section 2 of the Convention states:

"No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture."

Such marvelously clear, unequivocal, and principled language, to set a single standard for a world that makes it increasingly difficult for one to feel proud of humanity.

The Convention Against Torture has been and remains the supreme law of the land. It is a cornerstone of international law and a principle on a par with the prohibition against slavery and genocide.

"Mr. Snowden will not be tortured. Torture is unlawful in the United States." – United States Attorney General Eric Holder, July 26, 2013

John Brennan, appointed by President Obama in January 2013 to be Director of the CIA, has defended "rendition" as an "absolutely vital tool"; and stated that torture had produced "life saving" intelligence.

Obama had nominated Brennan for the CIA position in 2008, but there was such an outcry in the human-rights community over Brennan's apparent acceptance of torture, that Brennan withdrew his nomination. Barack Obama evidently learned nothing from this and appointed the man again in 2013.

During Cold War One, a common theme in the rhetoric was that the Soviets tortured people and detained them without cause, extracted phony confessions, and did the unspeakable to detainees who were helpless against the full, heartless weight of the Communist state. As much as any other evil, torture differentiated the bad guys, the Commies, from the good guys, the American people and their government. However imperfect the US system might be – we were all taught – it had civilized standards that the enemy rejected.