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## Bush's Torturers

Posted By [Justin Raimondo](#)

April 19, 2009

The idea that the U.S. is in the business of torturing people, with insects, no less, is the kind of thing one expected to hear from *Pravda* in the olden days of the Cold War. It is on a par with the old [KGB canard](#) that the U.S. invented the AIDS virus in a secret CIA lab, or the Belgian-babies-speared-on-German-bayonets [propaganda](#) that played such a key role in fomenting U.S. entry into World War I. And yet – and yet, it's apparently true, if [this](#) account is to be believed.

What are Americans to make of all this Abu Ghraib-like chamber of horrors? I compare it to [Abu Ghraib](#), because that is the level of horror we're all inured to by now, but this is much worse in that it was [the official policy](#) of the U.S. government, approved at [the highest levels](#), and not – as some characterized Abu Ghraib – a rogue operation carried out by low-level [bad apples](#). The whole thing was hidden from the public – but [not from congressional leaders](#), who were informed of the harsh interrogation methods and never objected or revealed what they knew.

This last is key to understanding one good reason why [no one](#) is being prosecuted, and why the [top Obamaites](#) (although not their rank-and-file followers) are generously declaring it's time to "move on." Going after the torturers, [we're told](#), would be too divisive. Well, yes, it would divide the Democratic Party, first and foremost, as the [complicity](#) of Pelosi & Co. is made all too clear and it turns out that torture is a bipartisan sport.

What is known as [the second Bybee memo](#), written by Jay S. Bybee, formerly of the Office of Legal Counsel and now a [sitting federal judge](#) in the San Francisco Bay area, is a masterful manifesto of [Bizarro World morality](#), a coldly precise dissertation on 10 torture techniques and why they're perfectly ethical and legal methods for Bush's torturers to employ. Imagine a legal brief written by [the Marquis de Sade](#).

What's even more eerie is the [context](#) in which all of this occurred: the torture sessions were witnessed and regulated by [a staff of doctors](#), psychologists, and other medical specialists. This team of torture specialists – torturologists, you might call them – monitored the victim's responses, and it was apparently their job to not only [prevent](#) the prisoner from dying, but to devise new and more painful techniques targeting their victim's [unique fears](#).

No one should be surprised at what's in the torture memos, most of which was [known](#) in its general outlines: what's shocking are the details, which bring home the utterly degraded character of those who [wrote the memos](#) and [approved the practices](#) they describe.

A secret bureaucracy of doctor-torturers overseen by the CIA, who disappeared hundreds of people and kept them captive for years – there is an air of unreality to all this, like a novel by [Gogol](#) or the sort of horror movie they only show at some ungodly hour of the morning. As dawn breaks, however, and the first sunlight illuminates the crimes of the American state, it's better to shut our eyes and pull the cover back over our heads. Or, as Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair [puts it](#): "Those methods, read on a bright, sunny, safe day in April 2009, appear graphic and disturbing." Ah, but...

*"It is important to remember the context of these past events. All of us remember the horror of 9/11. For months afterwards we did not have a clear understanding of the enemy we were dealing with, and our every effort was focused on preventing further attacks that would kill more Americans. It was during these months that the CIA was struggling to obtain critical information from captured al-Qaeda leaders, and requested permission to use harsher interrogation methods. The OLC memos make clear that senior legal officials judged the harsher methods to be legal."*

Oh, and we promise not to do it again – [scout's honor](#)! "But we will absolutely defend those who relied on these memos and those guidelines."

Blair then goes into a song-and-dance about how he remembers that veterans of the Vietnam War were subject to "scorn" for having fought in "an unpopular war." Debating policy options is one thing, he avers, but "disrespect" for those who served "honorably" and acted within "legal guidelines" is not. What if those "legal guidelines" were, themselves, illegal? Let's go to [this guy](#) for an expert legal opinion. I'm sure he'll have something interesting to contribute to the discussion.

It's entirely appropriate that Blair would bring up the Vietnam War, a conflict that involved the commission of war crimes as a deliberate strategy knowingly employed. There was [Operation Phoenix](#), in which entire areas were designated free-fire zones and field commanders had standing orders to eradicate everything that moved – and did. Is this serving honorably? To this day, [the fire-bombing of Dresden](#) and the [nuclear annihilation](#) of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are [routinely defended](#) by respectable historians and pundits, who point to the alleged necessity of defeating a greater evil, namely Hitler and Hirohito.

It matters little that neither the destruction of Dresden nor the nuking of two Japanese cities was necessary to end the war: the point is that the rulers of the U.S., and their intellectual amen corner, are great believers in "American exceptionalism." What this means is that when other nations commit war crimes, it is okay – indeed, it is incumbent on us – to [bring them to justice](#). When we do it, however – well, we're the *exception*, you see.

This exceptionalist perspective is all the vogue these days. If you're in debt and can't pay the bills, you must cut down on expenses and save every penny – unless you're the American government, in which case it's [spend, spend, spend!](#) If country A attacks country B in violation of every international precedent and code of conduct, then it is called aggression – [unless](#) country A is the United States of America, in which case it's called "liberation." If torture is plain evil, it must therefore be punished when the perpetrators become known – unless you're an American government official, in which case you get an automatic Get Out of Jail Free card, and a federal judgeship, to boot!

American exceptionalism – ain't it grand? It's the perfect expression of 21st-century Americanism in that it embodies the national zeitgeist of entitlement, the idea that we are a specially privileged lot, given a special mission in the world. This gives us a pass to commit acts that, when done by others, are crimes, but in our hands are magically transmuted into acts of virtue, even heroism.

The Bush administration took this exceptionalist principle to unprecedented lengths, yet it is incorrect to [claim](#), as the Obamaites are doing, that this administration is abjuring torture. CIA chief Leon Panetta has [testified](#) that they will not rule out "renditioning" prisoners to countries where torture is routine. So instead of torturing our own prisoners, we're going to farm it out to [overseas contractors](#) – behavior that would normally be considered ignoble in the extreme, except when engaged in by the U.S. government.

American exceptionalism: a useful concept, indeed!