

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

United States: the empire of barbarism The secret behind Guantánamo

by Thierry Meyssan
20 May 2010

You think that you are informed about what happened at Guantánamo and you are astonished that President Obama is reluctant to close this torture centre. You're wrong. You are not aware of the underlying purpose of this "facility" and why it is vital for the current administration.

Thierry Meyssan reveals the horrifying facts in this article first written in November 2009. Subsequent developments have proven him right: plans to close Guantánamo have been put on hold indefinitely.

We all remember the torture pictures that circulated on the Internet. They were purported to have been taken by a few soldiers as war trophies. Even so, unable to verify their authenticity, the mainstream media did not take the risk of publishing them. It was not until April 2004 that CBS broadcast a story on the abuses. It was the spark that triggered a big campaign denouncing the ill-treatment of Iraqi detainees. Abu Ghraib prison showed that the alleged war against the dictatorship of Saddam Hussein was in fact a war of occupation just like the rest, with the same litany of crimes. Not surprisingly, Washington attributed the abuses to a few unrepresentative individuals, labelled as "bad apples", acting without the knowledge of their military command. Some soldiers were arrested and tried for the example. The case was closed until the next round of revelations.

Meanwhile, the CIA and the Pentagon were getting U.S. and western public opinion into gear for a shift in moral values. The Agency had appointed an agent to liaise with Hollywood, Colonel Brandon Chase (Tommy Lee Jones' coursion) and hired famous

writers (like Tom Clancy) and scriptwriters to write new films and television series. The aim was to stigmatise Muslim culture and trivialise torture in the name of fighting terrorism.

For instance, the adventures of agent Jack Bauer in the 24H series, were copiously subsidised by the CIA to make sure that with each new season the threshold of tolerance would be pushed a little farther. In the early episodes, the hero intimidates suspects in order to extract information. In successive episodes, all characters suspect each other, and then torture each other, with progressively fewer qualms and the ever stronger conviction they are complying with their patriotic duty. In the collective imagination, centuries of humanism were being swept away and a new form barbarism was setting in. Thus, Washington Post columnist Charles Krauthammer, (who is also a psychiatrist) countenanced the use of torture as a "moral imperative" (sic) in these troubled times of war against terrorism.

In 2006, a Council of Europe investigation headed by Swiss Senator Dick Marty was released, establishing that the CIA had kidnapped thousands of people worldwide, including dozens or even hundreds within the boundaries of the European Union. Then came an avalanche of evidence of crimes committed inside the prisons at Guantánamo Bay (Caribbean) and Baghram (Afghanistan). Already thoroughly conditioned, public opinion in NATO member states had no problem accepting the official explanation, which was perfectly in line with the fictional intrigues it had been ingurgitating: to save innocent lives, Washington had to resort to secret practices; suspects were taken away and forced to talk through methods which were morally reprehensible but made necessary in view of their effectiveness.

On this simplistic narrative, candidate Barack Obama stood up against the outgoing Bush administration, pledging to make the prohibition of torture and the closure of secret prisons the overriding measures of his mandate. During the transition period following his election, he surrounded himself with top-level lawyers with the task of elaborating a strategy that would put an end to this black episode. Once in the White House, he dedicated his first executive orders to the implementation of his commitments. His eagerness enthralled international public opinion, generated enormous sympathy for the new president and renovated the image of the U.S. worldwide.

Except that more than one year after Barack Obama's election, if it's true that several hundred individual cases have been resolved, nothing has changed in substance. Guantanamo is still there and will not be closed in the foreseeable future. The associations for the defence of human rights are categorical: violence against detainees has worsened.

Asked to comment on this, Vice-President Joe Biden said that the more he delved into the matter, the more he discovered aspects which were previously unknown to him. Then, enigmatically, he warned the press against opening this Pandora's box. For his part, White House legal adviser Greg Craig handed in his resignation, not because he deemed

to have failed in his mission to close the center, but because he believed that afterwards his task would have proved impossible.

Why can't the President of the United States get his entourage to obey him? If everything has been said about the abuses of the Bush era, why talk about a Pandora's box; what is there to fear?

In reality, the system is more pervasive. It is not just limited to some abductions and a prison. Most of all, its function is radically different from what the CIA and the Pentagon have given us to understand. But before we begin our descent into hell, there is one confusion that needs to be clarified.

Counter-insurgency

What was done by the U.S. Army in Abu Ghraib, at least initially, bears no comparison with what is being experimented by the Navy in Guantánamo and in its other secret prisons. The Army did what all armies do when acting like a police force and faced with a hostile population. They subdue and terrorise it. In this case, the Coalition Forces replicated the crimes committed by the French during the Battle of Algiers against the Algerians, while at the same time referring to them as "compatriots". The Pentagon called upon retired French Army General Paul Aussaresses, a specialist in "counter-insurgency", to brief senior U.S. officers.

During his lengthy career, Aussaresses attended the United States wherever they were waging "low intensity wars", mainly in Southeast Asia and Latin America.

At the end of the Second World War, the United States set up two training centers specialised in these techniques, the Political Warfare Executive Academy (Taiwan) and the School of the Americas (Panama). Torture courses were dispensed to those in charge of the repressive apparatus in Asian and Latin American dictatorships. In the years 60-70, the setup functioned within the World Anti-Communist League, of which the Heads of State [1] involved were members. This policy was widely implemented in operations such as Phoenix in Vietnam (neutralisation of 80,000 people suspected of belonging to the Viet Cong) [2] and Condor in Latin America (elimination of political opponents across the continent) [3]. The same scheme, which coupled cleanup of insurgent areas with death squad activities, has been applied in Iraq, especially during Operation Iron Hammer [4].

The only novelty is that the GI's are provided with a classic of colonial literature, "The Arab Mind", written by anthropologist Raphael Patai, with a foreword by Colonel Norvell B. Atkins, owner of the John F. Kennedy Special Warfare School, the new name of the infamous School of the Americas since its relocation to Fort Bragg (North Carolina) [5]. The book, which proffers ridiculous stereotypes about "Arabs" in general under a pseudo-scientific sheen, includes a famous chapter on sexual taboos that inspired the scenes staged at Abu Ghraib.

The torture practices in Iraq do not constitute an isolated case, as the Bush administration would have us believe; they form part of a counter-insurgency strategy. The only way of stopping it is not to condemn them on moral grounds but to eradicate their political causes. However, Barack Obama keeps on pushing to a later date the withdrawal of foreign forces from Iraq.

The experiments of Professor Biderman

From a different perspective, Air Force psychiatrist Dr. Albert D. Biderman had investigated the brainwashing of U.S. POWs in North Korea on behalf of the Rand Corporation.

Long before Mao and communism, the Chinese had developed sophisticated methods to break the will of detainees to drill confessions into them. They were used during the Korean War with promising results: U.S. prisoners of war convincingly confessed before the press to crimes they had probably not committed. Biderman presented his initial findings at a Senate hearing on 19 June 1956, and before the Academy of Medicine in New York the following year (See documents downloaded below). He diagnosed the five distinct stages the "subjects" go through, as follows:

1. At first the prisoner refuses to cooperate and recedes into silence.
2. Through a mixture of brutality and kindness, he is taken through the second stage where he denies the charges against him.
3. Then, the prisoner starts to cooperate. He continues to proclaim his innocence, while trying to appease his interrogators by acknowledging that he might have made a mistake unintentionally, by accident or inadvertently.
4. By the fourth stage, the prisoner has lost all self-esteem. He continues to deny the accusations, but concedes they are of a criminal nature.
5. At the end of the process, the prisoner confesses his guilt. He even invents additional details to further incriminate himself and finally demands to be punished.

In addition, Biderman examined each of the techniques used by Chinese torturers to manipulate prisoners: isolation, control of their sensory perception, fatigue, threats, rewards, display of power by the jailers, deteriorating living conditions, stress. Physical abuse is of secondary importance while emotional abuse is all-encompassing and permanent.

Biderman's works on "brainwashing" have acquired a legendary dimension. The U.S. military feared that their men could be subverted by the enemy, and conditioned to say and, even worse, do anything. Consequently, they devised a training programme for their fighter pilots that would render them impervious to this form of torture and unyielding to the enemy, if captured. This training is known as SERE, which stands for Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape. Though the course was originally organised at the School of the Americas, it has now been extended to other categories of military personnel and is

conducted on several bases. Furthermore, training programmes of this nature have been set up in every NATO country.

After the invasion of Afghanistan, the Bush administration decided to apply these techniques to implant confessions in the prisoners which would prove, post facto, Afghanistan's involvement in the attacks of September 11, thereby Washington's version of those attacks.

New facilities were built on the Guantánamo naval base where experiments have been carried out. Albert Biderman's theory was complemented by a civilian psychologist, Professor Martin Seligman, a high-profile figure who is the former President of the American Psychological Association.

Seligman exploited a weakness in Ivan Pavlov's theory of conditioned reflexes. A dog is placed in a cage where the floor is split into two parts. One of the two sides is electrified at random. The animal jumps from one to the other trying to protect itself - so far, nothing surprising. Then, the momentum picks up and the entire cage is electrified. The animal realizes that it can not escape and that his efforts are futile. Soon, he gives up; he lies on the ground and enters into an altered state of consciousness that enables it to passively endure the suffering. The cage is then reopened. Surprise: the animal does not run away. The mental state it was in suppressed the dog's resistance. He stays lying down to endure the pain.

The Navy formed a high-powered medical team. In particular, it invited Professor Seligman to Guantánamo. This practitioner is a celebrity, renowned for his works on depression. His books on optimism and confidence are international bestsellers. It was he who oversaw the experiments on human guinea pigs. Just like the dog, certain prisoners who are subjected to terrible torture drift spontaneously into a psychological state that allows them to endure pain while draining them of all resistance. Through such manipulations, the prisoners quickly accede to stage 3 of the Biderman method.

While still relying on Biderman's teachings, U.S. torturers, under Professor Seligman's supervision, experimented and perfected every single coercitive technique. To do this, a scientific protocol was developed involving the measurement of hormonal fluctuations. To this end, a medical laboratory was installed at Guantánamo, where saliva and blood samples are taken at regular intervals on guinea pigs to assess their reactions.

The torturers have elevated their crimes to a new level of sophistication. For example, within the SERE programme, control of prisoners' sensorial perception was achieved by way of sleep prevention using stressful music. Much better results were obtained by broadcasting the despairing cries of babies for days on end. Or again, brandishing the supremacy of the jailers by subjecting the prisoners to beatings. In Guantánamo, they created the Immediate Reaction Force, a group in charge of punishing prisoners. When in action, its members wear Robocop-style body armor protection. They extract the prisoner from his cage and put him in a room with padded and upholstered plywood walls. They

fling the human guinea pig against the wall as if to smash him, but the plywood partially absorbs shocks so that the victim is dazed but his bones are not broken.

The main progress achieved was on the waterboarding technique. Ages ago, the Holy Inquisition used to plunge the head of a prisoner in a bathtub, pulling it out just before complete drowning. The sensation of imminent death provokes maximum anxiety. But the practice was primitive and accidents were frequent. Now, the prisoner is no longer immersed in a full bathtub; he is attached lying down in an empty tub. Water is poured over his head to induce suffocation; the procedure can be instantly interrupted as necessary. In this way, accidents are rare. Each session was codified to determine the limits of endurance. Auxiliaries are there to measure the amount of water used, the timing and duration of suffocation. At this stage, they recover any vomit, then weigh and analyze it to evaluate the amount of energy spent and the ensuing state of exhaustion.

As summed up by the CIA Deputy-Director before a congressional committee: "This has got nothing to do with the practices of the Inquisition, except for the water" (sic).

The experiments of U.S. doctors were not conducted in secrecy like those of Dr. Josef Mengele at Auschwitz, but under the direct and exclusive control of the White House. Everything was reported to a decision-making group of six people: Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, John Ashcroft and George Tenet, who attested to having participated in roughly a dozen of these meetings.

The outcome of these experiments is nevertheless disappointing. Rare are the guinea pigs who turned out to be receptive. Although it proved possible to inculcate a confession in them, their condition remained unstable and exposing them to public interrogation would have been too risky.

The best known case is that of pseudo-Khalil Sheikh Mohammed. He was arrested in Pakistan and accused of being an Islamist Kuwaiti, although it was clearly a case of mistaken identity. After being tortured at length and, in particular, subjected to waterboarding 183 times during the single month of March 2003, the individual finally confessed to being Khalil Sheikh Mohammed and to having organized 31 different attacks in the four corners of the earth, including the one at the World Trade Center in New York in 1993, as well as the bombing of a nightclub in Bali, the beheading of journalist Daniel Pearl and, last but not least, the attacks of September 11, 2001. Pseudo-Sheikh Mohammed maintained his confession before a military commission, but it was not possible for the lawyers and military judges to question him in public, for fear that once outside his cage he might renege on his confession.

To conceal the covert activities of the doctors at Guantanamo, the Navy organized media tours for the benefit of complacent journalists. Thus, French essayist Bernard Henry Levy volunteered to play witness by visiting what was safe for him to see. In his book *American Vertigo*, he assures that the prison is no different from other U.S. penitentiaries and that the reports on the alleged abuses being perpetrated "were rather exaggerated" (sic) [6].

Navy prisons offshore

In sum, the Bush administration considered that very few people could be manipulated to the point of believing that they had perpetrated the attacks of September 11. It concluded that it was necessary to test a large number of prisoners to be able to identify the most responsive.

Given the controversy around Guantánamo and in order to avoid indictment, the Navy developed other secret prisons which it set up in international waters beyond the reach of any international jurisdiction.

17 flat-bottomed ships - the kind used for troop disembarkment - have been converted into floating prisons fitted with cages like those used at the Guantanamo center. Three were identified by the U.K.-based association Reprive: USS Ashland, USS Bataan and USS Peleliu.

If one adds up all the people who over the past eight years have been taken prisoner in war zones or abducted anywhere in the world, a total of 80,000 persons are likely to have transited through the system, of whom less than one thousand have been pushed to the final stages of the Biderman process.

Consequently, the dilemma faced by the Obama administration is the following: it will not be possible to close Guantanamo without disclosing what was being done there. And it will be impossible to do that without also acknowledging that all the confessions obtained are false and were deliberately inculcated under torture, with the political consequences that it entails.

At the conclusion of the Second World War, twelve trials were held by a military tribunal at Nuremberg. One was devoted to 23 Nazi doctors. Seven were acquitted, nine were sentenced to prison and seven were sentenced to death. Since then, a Code of Medical Ethics was adopted, establishing the ethical rules of medicine worldwide. It prohibits precisely what U.S. doctors have done at Guantanamo and in other secret prisons.