

The Torture Trail – Then and Now

By Dr Les Dove

The recent public display of photographs depicting the abuse and torture of Iraq prisoners by US and British forces are indeed horrific. These kinds of abuses bring shame on any nation that permits them. However, the pretentious displays of disgust by the politicians of both these nations do not project the whole truth, nor does their perceived democratic rhetoric ensure that true human rights will prevail either in their own countries or within the sinister forces that act on their behalf abroad.

Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, and since signed by many countries, abuse of prisoners or citizens - whether at war or not, has been deemed a crime against humanity. That interdiction has, however, not prevented the torture and abuse of many other thousands of prisoners and dissenters, nor has it allowed most of them any form of recompense for their sufferings. Legislation has instead simply led security forces into adopting more insidious methods of torture and repression. Indeed, the United States and Britain both have a very long history of covert repression upon which they can draw from. The present abuses are at the end of a very long trail that stretches back to 1850 when in Port Arthur, Australia, Britain drove over 100 prisoners insane through the use of psychological torture methods. Indeed, Britain, France and the United States have all carried out torture during their colonial wars around the world and, in one form or another, that torture and abuse has continued unabated until the present day.

Recently the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, proposed a new law that will make any form of political dissent in Britain a criminal offense (5). David Blunkett, the British Home Secretary, is also adding another 1,000 Special Branch agents to make sure that repressive law is adhered to. Whatever, political repression within Britain is hardly new. Psychological control in British prisons has been a fact of life for many years. Political dissenters inside prison have been persecuted, tortured and otherwise 'neutralized' for well over a hundred years. Indeed, little or nothing in the way of political freedom has changed at all. What has changed are the methods used to cover up repression and torture. A recent Human Rights Watch report also highlighted much abuse by guards in inside American prisons here at home. It stated: "In recent years, U.S. prison inmates have

been beaten with fists and batons, stomped on, kicked, shot, stunned with electronic devices, doused with chemical sprays, choked, and slammed face first onto concrete floors by the officers whose job it is to guard them. Inmates have ended up with broken jaws, smashed ribs, perforated eardrums, missing teeth, burn scars—not to mention psychological scars and emotional pain. Some have died.” It then continued, “Both men and women prisoners—but especially women—face staff rape and sexual abuse. Correctional officers will bribe, coerce, or violently force inmates into granting sexual favors, including oral sex or intercourse. Prison staff have laughed at and ignored the pleas of male prisoners seeking protection from rape by other inmates. (6)”

That Britain signed the Geneva Convention has in no way prevented it from degenerating into a police state, nor has it prevented anyone who dares to challenge the status quo from being persecuted, tortured or even murdered by Special Branch or MI-5 agents. Having rules and regulations against this kind of abuse is one thing, being able to use them to good effect is quite another.

“By 1976 the British Ministry of Defense confirmed that 1,858 army officers and 262 senior civil servants had been trained to use psychological torture techniques for *internal* security purposes. And furthermore that psyops have acquired the ability to launch political campaigns in pursuit of military objectives *without reference* to the political regime (1).” And in an interview with The Irish Times it was stated that: “High officials in Intelligence, MI5 and MI6, consider their organizations to be *above the law*. (2)”

In other words the above organizations – and their agents, are answerable to nobody but the Queen of England, to whom they are sworn to serve. Indeed, as is every politician within Britain. The Queen alone has the absolute power of veto over all parliamentary decisions which undoubtably makes Tony Blair’s frequent rhetoric about freedom and democracy something of a cruel charade, to say the very least. So much for free speech and accountability through the so-called elected representatives of the British people. Who, if they really desire freedom and democracy, have no other option but to become political dissidents?

Human Rights organizations within Britain have also fallen far short of what was expected of them by dissidents. Indeed, Amnesty International, Liberty and Redress do nothing whatsoever to address the widespread repression by MI-5 within Britain. These so-called human rights groups are considered to be no more than 'front organizations' by serious human rights researchers most of whom now steer well clear of them for obvious reasons. The media in Britain has also degenerated into being little more than a mouthpiece for their masters. None of the national newspapers reflect the true state of what is really happening the country and censorship of all kinds is widespread. Indeed, were it not for the Internet, the real Britain would be all but unknown and the plight of the tortured and repressed would have continued to be hidden as it has been for so many years in the past.

Many Americans have for a long time wondered why so many peoples around the world hate them. The answer to that question is more than obvious to anyone who has studied human rights in depth. For, like Britain, America also has security services that have long considered them selves to be above the law, even though in the United States, unlike Britain, they are to some small extent answerable to the law.

Whatever, the American Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has been involved with death squads and tortures almost from the day it was conceived. The overthrow of the legitimate governments of Guatemala, Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Panama, Iran, Greece, Laos, Honduras, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Brazil, Cambodia, Bolivia, Angola, Uruguay and Indonesia plus many other legitimate governments was organized by the CIA (4). All these governments were then replaced by dictators, often financed and maintained by the CIA, who began a reign of torture and terror that resulted in the deaths of millions of men, women and children.

Indeed, death squads, torture, disappearances and dreadful mutilations became the hallmark of the CIA throughout many countries all over the world. According to the writer Keith Parkins, "The USA, using the CIA as it's lead agency, is widely acknowledged as the world's leading sponsor of terrorism. During the Reagan years alone, the CIA proxy army the Contras killed 8.000 Nicaraguan civilians. In Chile the bloody overthrow of the Allende regime saw 130.000 Chileans murdered, tortured and disappeared. The CIA intervention in Central America is one long litany of unspeakable bloody tragedy. (3)"

Ralph McGehee, a CIA agent for 25 years, stated:

“The CIA is not now nor has it ever been a central intelligence agency. It is the covert action arm of the President's foreign policy advisers. In that capacity it overthrows or supports foreign governments while reporting "intelligence" justifying those activities. It shapes its intelligence, even in such critical areas as Soviet nuclear weapons capability, to support presidential policy. Disinformation is a large part of its covert action responsibility, and the American people are the primary target of its lies (9).”

Indeed, The Association for Responsible Dissent estimates that by 1987, **six million** people had died as a result of CIA covert operations. Few of which the American people had ever heard about. Yet torture methods and the tactics of terror are taught right here in the USA at the ‘School of the Americas’ in Fort Benning, Georgia. Truthful reporting of these terrible events was largely ignored by the mainstream American media. As a result most Americans were, and still are, totally ignorant of them. These atrocities were, however, carried out in the name of all Americans. Whether by their own bloody hands or the hands of their paid free-lancers the CIA has done more to damage the good image of America than any other security service. Surely the American people are entitled to have security services that act in the best interests of all Americans rather than the elite few who head huge multinational companies.

Had the American public been truly informed as to what their various governments had been doing over the years much repression and horror throughout the world may have been avoided? But as John Swinton, the former Chief of Staff of the New York Times, stated:

"There is no such thing, at this date of the world's history, in America as an independent press. You know it and I know it. There is not one of you who dare to write your honest opinions, and if you did, you know beforehand that it would never appear in print. I am paid weekly for keeping my honest opinions out of the paper I am connected with. Others of you are paid similar salaries for similar things, and any of you who would be so foolish as to write honest opinions would be out on the streets looking for another job. If I allowed my honest opinions to appear in one issue of my paper, before twenty-four hours my occupation would be gone. The business of the journalists is to destroy the truth; to lie outright; to pervert; to vilify; to fawn at the feet of mammon, and to sell his country and his race for his daily

bread. You know it and I know it and what folly is this toasting an independent press? We are the tools and vassals of rich men behind the scenes. We are jumping jacks, they pull the strings and we dance. Our talents, our possibilities and our lives are all the property of other men. We are intellectual prostitutes. (8)"

Since his retirement Walter Cronkite, the famous TV newscaster and journalist, has also voiced similar criticism of the American Media. He has been quoted as saying: "My lips have been kind of buttoned for almost twenty years."

The CIA, against the law, is also thought to be directly responsible for the repression and torture of American citizens inside the USA today. Indeed, many American dissenters are now being targeted simply for refusing to believe the garbage much of the US media passes off as news. Using stooges and free-lancers the CIA has –like MI-5 in the UK, taken to using the military microwave machine to ‘neutralize’ its targets. The CIA then uses that old standby ‘plausible deniability’ to shrug off torture allegations made against it. Yet on one Internet site alone there are hundreds of victims whose allegations of repression and torture are backed up by many doctors and other professionals who have no doubt whatsoever who is behind these present day atrocities. Indeed, some former members of the American intelligence community have confirmed our darkest fears.

The prime reason for George Bush’s utter refusal to become a member of the International World Court is easy to understand. Should America become a member he knows full well that at some future date many present and past members of the CIA, not to mention the National Security Agency, would be held fully accountable for the horrors they have perpetrated throughout the world. And that is something only a very courageous President would permit. To do so would expose to the entire world the true nature of American foreign policy during the last fifty years or so at the very least, and underscore the involvement of the American Presidents who permitted it. It would also expose the manipulation of public opinion by the American media and the gullibility of Americans for so readily believing the many lies and distortions told to them by Congress and their so-called free press. What governments say they are doing – and what they really are doing, are often two quite different things.

Now seems a good time to look back on a speech given many years ago by a true American patriot.

The following is an excerpt of a speech, delivered in 1933, by Major General Smedley Butler, former Commandant of the United States Marine Corps.

“War is just a racket. A racket is best described, I believe, as something that is not what it seems to the majority of the people. Only a small inside group knows what it is about. It is conducted for the benefit of the very few at the expense of the masses.

I believe in adequate defense at the coastline and in nothing else. If a nation comes over here to fight, then we'll fight. The trouble with America is that when the dollar only earns six percent over here, then it gets restless and goes overseas to get 100 percent. Then the flag follows the dollar and the soldiers follow the flag.

I wouldn't go to war again as I have done to defend some lousy investment of the bankers. There are only two things that we should fight for. One is the defense of our homes and the other is the Bill of Rights. War for any other reason is simply a racket.

There isn't a trick in the racketeering bag that the military gang is blind to. It has its "finger men" to point out enemies, its "muscle men" to destroy enemies, its "brain men" to plan war preparations, and a "Big Boss"—Super nationalistic Capitalism.

It may seem odd for me, a military man to adopt such a comparison. Truthfulness compels me to. I spent thirty-three years and four months in active military service as a member of our country's most agile military force—the Marine Corps. I served in all commissioned ranks from a Second Lieutenant to Major General. And during that period, I spent most of my time being a high-class muscleman for Big Business, for Wall Street and for the Bankers. In short, I was a racketeer, a gangster for capitalism.

I suspected I was just a part of a racket at the time. Now I am sure of it. Like all members of the military profession, I never had an original thought until I left the service. My mental facilities remained in suspended animation while I obeyed the orders of higher-ups. This is typical with everyone in the military service,

I helped make Mexico—especially Tampico—safe for American oil interests in 1914. I helped make Haiti and Cuba a decent place for the National City Bank boys to collect revenues in. I helped in the raping of half a dozen Central American republics for the benefits of Wall Street. The

record of racketeering is long. I helped purify Nicaragua for the international banking house of Brown Brothers in 1909-1912. I brought light to the Dominican Republic for American sugar interests in 1916. In China I helped see to it that Standard Oil went its way unmolested.

During those years, I had, as the boys in the back room would say, a swell racket. I was rewarded with honors, medals, and promotions. Looking back on it, I feel that I might have given Al Capone a few hints. The best he could do was to operate his racket in three districts. I operated on three continents. (7)”

Things haven't changed so much as we might have expected since then, have they? However, as Harry C Bauer said, “What is right with America is a willingness to discuss what's wrong with America.”

The American media has finally shown courage in widely exposing the CIA horrors in Iraq. That truth has been much appreciated by good Americans everywhere. Let the media now be more courageous still and start to expose what is happening right here inside America today. And Britain. America may then become a country the entire world can look up to, and respect.

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(2) Bloch. J. Fitzgerald. P. ‘British Intelligence and Covert Action.’
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(3) Parkins. K. ‘Intelligence Services Unaccountable and Out of Control.’
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(4) Killing Hope: ‘U.S. Military and CIA Interventions since World War II.’
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(5) The Sunday Herald. UK.

(6) Human Rights Watch. Prisoner Abuse: How Different are U.S. Prisons?
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- (7) From GIDRA, a California Asian paper. 4221 Germantown Avenue/Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- (8) Swinton. J. 1953. In a toast before the New York Press Club.
- (9) McGehee. R. Deadly Deceits. Book, published in 1983. McGehee account of the CIA in his book Deadly Deceits