



'Vicious killers' en route to Guantanamo

Human rights watch
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Best trained vicious killers

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During the Second World War some British commandos handcuffed a group of German soldiers they had taken prisoner. This was at a time when German concentration camps were bulging with all sorts of innocent victims : gypsies and Jews; Russians; Yugoslavs; German churchmen; Poles - all sorts of humans were imprisoned in hideous conditions that for millions led to death by starvation, gas or bullet. But the handcuffing incident made the Germans exceedingly angry. How could such a thing happen between civilised combatants?



It was a strange, schizophrenic mindset that could ignore the dreadful sufferings of such Russian prisoners of war simply because they were people regarded by the Nazis as so inferior that they were not human beings at all. They were the untermensch. Literally it means sub-human, and most Germans of the period who knew of the camps (comparatively few) believed there was nothing wrong in treating sub-humans like, well, sub-humans. But when a civilised country like Britain permitted its soldiers to handcuff German army prisoners, what could the world be coming to? This was an entirely different kettle of fish, and Germany was most upset about it.

stan (and those spirited away by the CIA from other countries without even a modicum of legal sanction) "didn't go around with uniforms with their weapons in public display, with insignia and behave in a manner that an army behaves in; they went around like terrorists, and that's a very different thing." Let us try to make sense of Mr Rumsfeld's statement.

Mr Rumsfeld avers that if a captured person has no uniform, does not display his weapon(s) openly, and fails to wear insignia then he can be treated in any fashion decreed by his captor. This contention is based, erroneously, on Article 4 (2) (a) to (d) of the Geneva Convention (which does not mention 'insignia' but specifies "a fixed distinctive sign recognisable at a distance"). Who can forget the photograph of CIA members dressed in civilian garb, without any fixed distinctive sign (or insignia), and not openly carrying weapons at the siege in the north of Afghanistan? As is becoming only too common, there is one law for the United States and one for everyone else.

US contradiction and contravention of Geneva goes further. The Convention states that "Should any doubt arise as to whether persons, having committed a belligerent act and having fallen into the hands of an enemy, belong to any of the categories enumerated in Article 4, such persons shall enjoy the

The German army, most of whose fighting soldiers had no idea they were at war in the cause of gas chambers and other horrors, was indignant. So were the British themselves, because war, after all, has rules of sorts, and once you start down the slippery slope of treating people as animals, who knows where you will end? So Mr Churchill issued orders that nothing of this sort was to occur again; and it didn't. Shooting people who were shooting at you was OK, but handcuffing them after they stopped shooting was forbidden. Such is the madness of man; but in a way there was a weird logic behind the system of treatment of captured combatants. This shaky reasoning, which did keep at least some human rights on a fairly even keel, has been destroyed.

America's treatment of prisoners in its camp at Guantanamo Bay in Cuba has been strict. It is absurd for such as the US Secretary for War on Iraq, Mr Donald Rumsfeld, to claim that prisoners are being well-treated, but we accept that they are not being tortured, if not being tortured includes being permitted only two exercise periods of fifteen minutes outside their cells each week. The cells measure eight by six feet and the captives are shackled when they leave them, but, as pointed out by Alasdair Palmer of London's *Daily Telegraph*, manacles and leg-chains are clamped as a matter of course on all prisoners in the US. And which of us, seeing a photograph of an erstwhile Master of the Wall Street Universe, stripped of the trappings of corporate wealth and slammed inside for despicable financial deception, stumbling along in clanking fetters of steel, has not experienced a delicious stab of guilty pleasure? How good for them, we think: how splendid that this greedy creep should be so humiliated. Come on; admit it.

protection of the present convention until such time as their status has been determined by a competent tribunal." This has been deliberately, flagrantly – contemptuously – ignored by the United States. The message to the world is that America could not give a tinker's damn about any international agreement of any sort, and twists accords in the interests of the spurious patriotic righteousness with which Mr Bush has anointed every unscrupulous and ignoble activity of the US government in the "War Against Terrorism".

But I could be wrong about the whole affair. After all, the Vice-President of the United States, the gallant warrior Mr Cheney, said on Fox News in January that the Guantanamo Bay captives are "The very worst of a bad lot. They are very dangerous. They are devoted to killing millions of Americans, innocent Americans, if they can, and they are perfectly prepared to die in the effort. And they need to be detained, treated very cautiously, so that our people are not at risk." Well, now, there is a thing to think about. The Vice-President himself told the world that every single one of the Guantanamo Bay prisoners is a very dangerous potential killer. This statement cannot be ignored. It is precise and definitive, and emanates from the highest level of the US Administration. It must be true.

In the same month Mr Rumsfeld stated "these people were involved in an effort to kill thousands of Americans. Second, they were captured and they were unlawful combatants." He also exclaimed that one of the detainees "threatened to kill Americans" and another "has bitten a US military guard". The Miami Herald reported Mr Rumsfeld as pronouncing that "They are not POWs. They will not be determined to be POWs. They are amongst the most dangerous, best

But it cannot be claimed that the normal practices of American Federal and States' criminal justice systems, in shackling prisoners and keeping them in disgusting conditions, in any way renders it legal or permissible for the prisoners in Guantanamo to be treated likewise. There is one very good reason for this: such treatment of 'any' human being in the Twenty-First Century by the "Greatest Nation on Earth" (Mr Bush's description) - or any other country - is revolting and a crime against humanity.

The frightening thing is that it is difficult to find an American who considers such Fifteenth Century practices to be unjustified, regrettable or even unusual. And, according to Mr Palmer, Britain's *Daily Mirror* newspaper found that more than 80 per cent of its readers "thought there was nothing wrong with what happens at Guantanamo Bay." Now, you may say that the average *Mirror* reader is an ignorant cretin whose cultural horizon is as limited as Mr Donald Rumsfeld's compassion, but, again, this does not make it right to treat people in a fashion that would be approved by Tomas de Torquemada of the Spanish Inquisition in 1490.

American unilateralism has taken a disturbing direction by invention of a new term to describe people detained by US armed forces or armed civilian elements such as the Central Intelligence Agency. This is "unlawful combatant", which status is not mentioned in the Geneva Convention. The Convention has been inescapably ratified by the US, which is precisely why Washington has unilaterally changed the rules. It has been pronounced by Washington that so-called unlawful combatants "have no rights under the Geneva Convention" governing treatment of prisoners of war. Clever, isn't it? As Mr Rumsfeld has said several times, the captives taken in Afghani-

amongst the most dangerous, best trained, vicious killers on the face of the earth." This is precise and definitive and emanates from the highest level of the US Administration. It must be true.

This is serious stuff indeed. "Best trained killers" is a terrifying phrase. We should look at this again: it was stated publicly and categorically by the senior defence official in the US Administration that all captives in Guantanamo Bay prison are the most dangerous, best trained, vicious killers on the face of the earth. His words are on record, just as are those of Mr Cheney. They have not been denied. They must be true.

But if Mr Cheney and Mr Rumsfeld imagine that the seventy-year old, white-bearded Afghan, Mr Faiz Muhammad, recently released from Guantanamo prison, who was described by the *New York Times* correspondent as a "partially deaf, shrivelled old man, unable to answer simple questions" who mostly "babbled like a child" is one of the world's "best trained killers" they are demented freaks.

If Mr Rumsfeld and Mr Cheney consider that another recently-released Afghan, Mr Mohammad Sadiq, "a gnarled figure with a cane, also apparently in his seventies", is one of the "most vicious killers on the face of the earth" they are drivelling idiots. These decrepit ancients, the modern-day American untermensch, Messrs Faiz Muhammad and Mohammad Sadiq, were, it was stated by the Vice-President of the United States and the Defense Secretary of the United States, "devoted to killing millions of Americans" (Mr Cheney) and "involved in an effort to kill thousands of Americans" (Mr Rumsfeld).

What a pair of pathetic, stupid old men. And I don't mean the poor old Afghans.

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