

Human Rights - as defined by Rumsfeld

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One of these days the leader of a country is going to read an Amnesty International (AI) report about his nation and say 'My goodness, these people at Amnesty have no axe to grind; they have recorded horrible violations of human rights in the place I govern, and I must do something about it because no civilized country can permit such appalling behaviour.' And I will then see squadrons of winged pigs flapping past my window.



But perhaps there is the remote possibility that some leaders with moral principles - maybe four or five in the 151 governments described by Amnesty in its 2003 Report as having transgressed the laws of decency concerning treatment of human beings - could, one of these days, admit to wrongdoing. What a breakthrough that would be. One can imagine the headlines. The report would be on page 17 of The Times or The New York Times, between such items as "Teenage Bad Breath Epidemic" and "Traffic Light System Revolution". In other words, only some dedicated souls in organisations such as AI and Human Rights Watch (HRW) and a few individuals with a sense of morality give a damn about vicious treatment of their fellow humans by almost every government in the world.

I would be amazed if one national leader has read the AI Report, and doubt that more than a handful even received a briefing on it. This is because torture, illegal imprisonment, capital punishment and such matters have no effect on their electoral or dictatorial prospects. We have to remember that these people have no conscience. They are insentient robots, born with political barcodes on their bottoms.

without explanation, apology or compensation they were removed from their cells and sent back to their countries. The hundreds still in the Gulag have not been charged with any crime. Such treatment is claimed to be "within the norms of the global community". Hoggwash.

Amnesty encapsulates US obligations by stating that "All persons under any form of detention or imprisonment, including prisoners of war and other persons arrested, detained or interned for reasons related to an armed conflict have numerous fundamental rights recognized under international human rights and humanitarian law." When Amnesty wrote to Washington to make this point it was ignored. There was not even the courtesy of a reply.

Bush has declared a "war" on terrorism. This is his choice of expression: he has stated that he has committed his country to war - but when a country goes to war there are still laws to be obeyed. If the US, in the Bush war on terrorism, does not abide by international laws to which it has agreed in solemn treaty, then it becomes difficult to condemn its enemies when they react to America's flagrant abuses of human rights by committing more atrocities. Last October Rumsfeld released four men from the Gulag. All were over 60, which by Afghan standards is truly ancient. It would be absurd to even joke that they were "best trained vicious killers", but this is how they were described by Rumsfeld. Little wonder the world holds him in risible contempt.

The US has created a mighty rod for its own back by unilaterally abrogating international conventions on human rights. One must agree that "It is wrong to prop up a regime that routinely stifles all the freedoms that make us human", for this is common sense. But what happens when these freedoms are stifled by the United States? It was the US president who made that comment, in the context of Cuba, and



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bottoms.

Their lives have been devoted to achievement of power by any means. On the way to power they lost touch with reality, and the longer they stay in power the more remote from real people they become. Their advisers and gofers are dedicated officials, but not in the same way as AI and HRW staffers, for example. Far from it: they are utterly, even ferociously, devoted to keeping the leader where he is, and if this demands manipulation, deviousness and sheer downright lying, so be it. They must defend at all costs the person from whose ascendancy their own prosperity derives. They also enjoy wielding power, but because this power is utterly dependant on survival of the figure at the top it is vital they keep him there.

You have doubts about this? Here are two statements from Bush administration officials that are on the surface sane, humane and responsible. First, Lorne Craner, Assistant Secretary, Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, on 4 March 2002: "Over the past few months, I have heard the worry that the war on terrorism will sideline America's interest in human rights. This is far from true. In fact, the protection of human rights is even more important now than ever. The US Government is deeply committed to the promotion of universal human rights..." Splendid stuff.

Next, the US Ambassador at large for war crimes issues, Pierre-Richard Prosper, on 20 February 2002, when he said of the non-persons in the Guantanamo Gulag: "In bringing these abusers to justice the United States will continue to honour and uphold the rule of law and work within the norms of the global community in answering the challenge that faces us all. In doing so we will continue to uphold relevant legal standards of treatment with respect to the detainees in our custody". Wonderful.

These blinkered buffoons dare not admit there can be anything wrong concerning US treatment of hundreds of human beings it holds in isolated captivity, forbidden contact with legal advisers or with any person outside the American military system except, of course, the saints of the International Red Cross who cannot comment publicly about those they visit. The Guantanamo captives were described by defence secretary Rumsfeld as "among the most dangerous, best trained, vicious killers on the face of the earth."

This is foolish mendacity, as dozens of these "vicious killers" have been let out of captivity by Rumsfeld. But they were kept in prison for eighteen months without knowing if they would ever be released, although it is obvious they were completely innocent of wrongdoing. Suddenly,

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he was right. But does he spare no thought for the thirteen-year-old children in Guantanamo Bay - his colonial enclave in Cuba - whose freedoms have been stifled at his orders?

The words of assistant secretary for human rights, Lorne Craner, and of ambassador for war crimes issues, Pierre-Richard Prosper, are bumbling humbug. These ridiculous robots deliver batch-processed statements written by speechwriters who regurgitate meaningless platitudes at the scanning of their back-side barcodes. Their audiences know they are talking gibberish, and, deep down, perhaps they, too, realise they are empty vessels, producing sonorous tones when struck by a heavy memo from their superiors. To a degree one must be sorry for them, in all their fatuous irrelevance, for they will achieve nothing of human value during their lives. They are not necessarily amoral or immoral: just a sad joke.

The more exalted empty vessels, however, bong and gong away by themselves because they have abandoned morality for a video-game world of virtuous warriors and skulking "bad folks" in which they bluster about the need to eradicate terrorism while playing into the hands of those they seek to neutralize. By immature and callous encouragement of violations of basic human rights, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Rice and the rest of the zealots have forfeited the trust and goodwill of those nations who are the strongest supporters of the values that the Washington of Bush claims to support.

The abrogation of decency is nowhere better indicated than in the words of Rumsfeld quoted in AI's Report. America, he said, treats Guantanamo prisoners "for the most part . . . in a manner that is reasonably consistent with the Geneva Conventions to the extent they are appropriate". In other words, the Pentagon handles these people as the German SS did the Jews and Poles and Russians in the 1940s: as sub-humans underserving of tolerance or the protection of law.

To Rumsfeld, the Geneva Conventions are to be heeded only if he considers them "consistent" with his fanaticism. His insolent, arrogant use of the phrases "for the most part" and "reasonably consistent" sums up the attitude of Bush's Washington to international obligations and treaties. Every time he and other zealots open their mouths they bring closer the next terrorist outrage. Their conduct over the Guantanamo scandal is helping swell the ranks of worldwide terror gangs. This is what happens when people like Rumsfeld are encouraged to act out their brutal fantasies of imperialism in the real world.

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