

From Guantanamo to Al Ghraib

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So much of documentary evidence and graphic details of barbarity against the hapless Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib Prison, outside Baghdad, have been catalogued as to shame any civilized government and people. But that doesn't seem to be the case with the Bush administration or the American people, for that matter.

Apparently, those horrible, grotesque, photographs of Iraqi prisoners being tortured like stray dogs, that made headlines throughout the world recently and sent shock waves travelling right up to Congress were just the tip of the iceberg. Congress, according to the *New York Times* of May 13, has been given 1,800 additional photographs and video images of Iraqi prisoners — both males and females — being tortured, massively humiliated and sexually abused with abandon. Congress doesn't know what to decide about them: allow them to become public or keep them under wraps, for understandable reasons.

This latest cache of evidence on American soldiers' moral depravity and the heinous degradation, at their hands, of their Iraqi captives is, to say the least, lethal and could be devastating for Bush in this sensitive election year. That's why the Republican-dominated Congress is taking its own time to make up its mind one way or the other.

Maureen Dowd, the *New York Times'* celebrated columnist and a trenchant critic of the Bush administration, spoke to Senator Dianne Feinstein, the Democratic lady Senator from California, who had this to say after viewing some of the material sent up to Congress: "They're disgusting. If somebody wanted to plan a clash of civilizations, this is how they'd do it. These pictures play into every stereotype of America that Arabs have: America as debauched, America as hypocrites."

Surprisingly, however, a public manifestation of revulsion over these graphic violations of the Iraqi people's dignity and human rights is more conspicuous by its absence.

The American people's apathy and absence of any organized sense of moral outrage is all the more astounding, given the massive disapproval of the Iraqi invasion, both before the event and afterward. Anti-war protests had brought tens of thousands of Americans marching on the streets of every major city in America. The dissent on display in Europe was even larger. But in this case, with so much evidence of moral abuse by the occupation power of Iraq on display, neither the Americans nor the Europeans have been sufficiently outraged, or galvanized, to bring them pouring out on the streets.

As for Bush and his neo conservative cohorts, after an initial show of remorse for largely public consumption, there is now a massive exercise in the works to pin the blame on a handful of lowly soldiers and petty officers while shielding the top brass at the Pentagon from any scrutiny or culpability for the crimes at Abu Ghraib.

Rumsfeld, the principal architect of war on Iraq, has been exonerated by Bush of any responsibility. Despite calls from some Senators and top Republican leaders to demand Rumsfeld's resignation, or fire him, Bush is standing firmly behind his right hand man. No question of holding Rumsfeld responsible for any wrongdoing because were he charged, the flames of wrath might also lick Bush personally. So Bush went up to Pentagon, two days after Rumsfeld had been grilled on the Hill, to hail

him as the greatest Secretary of Defence America has ever had. Bush eulogized Rumsfeld for doing "a superb job" in the "war against terror" and reminded the American people that they collectively owed Rumsfeld "a debt of gratitude".

In another show of caring two hoots about what the world might think or say about the horrific atrocities committed against Iraqi prisoners at Abu Ghraib, the notorious prison — which became synonymous with the tyranny of Saddam against his own people — has now been officially entrusted into the hands of Maj General Geoffrey Miller. Rumsfeld and General Meyers, Chairman Joint Chiefs of Staff at the Pentagon, have rushed to Baghdad on an unscheduled visit to confer with Miller, presumably about new methods of interrogation (or torture?) to be adopted under Miller's command.

General Miller earned notoriety as the commandant of the Guantanamo Bay Prison in Cuba where more than 600 prisoners, allegedly Al Qaeda and Taliban sympathisers, have been sequestered without any legal authority or indictment. Massive abuses of the Guantanamo inmates have been routinely reported by the ICRC and other humanitarian bodies. All those violations were committed on Gen Miller's watch whose extra-judicial tactics and methods to grill prisoners must have impressed Rumsfeld enough to promote him for the job in Iraq.

The Bush administration's blatant lie that what transpired at Abu Ghraib were the antics of only "a

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handful of soldiers", as Gen Meyers vehemently insisted, is nailed by the evidence that Gen Miller was brought over from Cuba to Baghdad last September to share his 'expertise' on prisoner interrogation with the team at Abu Ghraib.

Apparently, the Miller syndrome caught up very quickly with the wardens of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. His ace technique to humiliate prisoners, which he describes in a recent interview with the *Washington Post* as "stress positions", was given the pride of place in the way the Iraqi prisoners were treated, thereafter. The ICRC was the first independent agency to get an insight into the crimes being perpetrated against the Iraqi prisoners. On a visit to Abu Ghraib last October, the Red Cross officials saw Iraqis being held totally naked in dark cells. The *Wall Street Journal* has just recently put the 24-page ICRC report of that visit on its website. The report, released last February, had been confidentially passed on to the US government much earlier than that.

According to the report, "Upon witnessing such cases, the ICRC interrupted its visits and requested an explanation from the authorities. The military intelligence officer in charge of interrogation explained that this practice was 'part of the process'." Which forced ICRC to conclude: "Persons

deprived of their liberty face the risk of being subjected to a process of physical and psychological coercion, in some cases tantamount to torture."

There isn't a shred of evidence to suggest that Gen Miller or his boss Rumsfeld — a 'great survivor', according to his own proclamation — have any grain of remorse or repentance about the barbaric, inhuman, methods they gave currency to at Abu Ghraib and elsewhere in Iraq.

The *New York Times* carried a front-page dateline from its correspondent in Baghdad based on the past track record of Gen Miller and recent conversations with him. He was asked, in the light of the abuse scandal, as to what in his view were acceptable interrogation practices. Miller's answer was revealing of his own mentality as well as of his supporters in high places. Miller cited about 50 coercive techniques his soldiers were using against prisoners, including sleep deprivation, bright lights, blaring music, etc.

Miller had no room in his 'ingenious' techniques for any observance of the Geneva Convention which bans "acts of violence against prisoners of war". Rumsfeld is at one with him.

How much implicit and explicit support of Rumsfeld Miller has in his almanac of draconian methods to subject prisoners to torture is borne out from a recent report in the *Washington Post*. It said Miller had received Pentagon's total endorsement of at least 20 interrogation techniques for Guantanamo, including sleep deprivation, exposing inmates to heat or cold, "invoking feelings of futility" and disorienting them with bright lights and loud music.

It is obvious that Miller has been promoted to Abu Ghraib — a much larger concentration camp than Guantanamo — to use the techniques he honed in Cuba on his Iraqi charges with impunity, or fear of being questioned about his brutal methods.

With so much evidence now on record of a sustained methodology of torture and massive coercion applied over so long at Abu Ghraib, it makes no sense for Bush and his minions to insist that what happened there was the work of a few deranged soldiers on the loose. ICRC has long been on

record trying to draw the world's attention to a systematic and wholesale plunder of the Iraqi prisoners' moral dignity and human rights at the hands of their American captors. Its director of operations, Pierre Karehenbuehl, once again insisted, in the wake of recent revelations, "We are dealing here with a broad pattern, not individual acts. There was a pattern and a system."

Bush and his neo cons have apparently no concern for the human rights of a people who have been mercilessly pounded and butchered since the fall of Baghdad more than a year ago. They are dealing with the rights and lives of the Iraqis the way Bush's 'buddy' Sharon has been trampling over the rights and lives of the Palestinians in the occupied lands.

It may be a taboo subject for the American news media but is well known in Iraq and the Middle East that Iraq is presently teeming with thousands of Israeli agents who have come in tow with the American occupiers of the land in all garbs and guises, including the cover of at least 20,000 private 'contractors' blessed by the Pentagon. It was the murder of four of these 'contractors' last month that unleashed the yet unending cycle of violence and reprisals in Iraq's heartland and has consumed nearly a thousand Iraqi lives. But who cares for Iraqi lives; they are cheap and expendable. ■