

Rule of New Torturers in Iraq

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The exposé of the horrific abuses inflicted by the U.S. military against detainees at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, along with growing opposition by Iraqis of all political persuasions to the U.S. military occupation, has created a qualitatively new situation with global ramifications. For the first time since Ronald Reagan initiated a changed world of retrogression with a series of unbridled U.S. military interventions in the 1980s, the U.S. is encountering a serious setback in its effort to translate its global power into the imposition of total dominance on lands overseas.

The pictures from Abu Ghraib are the international equivalent of the videotape showing Rodney King being beaten by the Los Angeles police in the 1990s. The two have a similar origin: the repressive measures taken by bourgeois society to “maintain order” in the face of a rebellious population.

Despite the Bush administration's effort to blame the abuses at Abu Ghraib on a few soldiers, it is increasingly clear that the dehumanization which occurred there was widespread, systematic, and encouraged by those at the top. As Seymour Hersh, who broke the story in *THE NEW YORKER* put it, the abuse of prisoners in Iraq is “almost a routine fact of life that the soldiers felt no need to hide.”

The problems facing the U.S. in Iraq come into focus with Abu Ghraib, but they by no means end there. Even before the prison scandal broke, Iraqis of virtually every political persuasion expressed their disgust at the U.S. military's brutality in containing uprisings in Falluja, Najaf, and Karbala. Faced with the threat of losing control of these areas, the U.S. has rehired former Ba'athist officers who served under Saddam Hussein—thereby giving the lie to the claim that its occupation has anything to do with bringing “democracy” to the Iraqi people.

These developments are causing deep divisions within ruling circles, including in the military. Some officials admit that while the U.S. is prevailing militarily it has lost the

trust of Iraqis. A recent Gallup poll showed that the vast majority of Iraqis want the U.S. to withdraw immediately. Some in the U.S. military have even concluded that the war is effectively lost, even as Bush insists the U.S. will need to keep troops in Iraq for another five years.

EXPORT OF PRISON ABUSE

There is no question that the abuses at Abu Ghraib represent an export of U.S. prison-control techniques to nations overseas. Charles A. Graner Jr., the officer charged with many of the abuses at Abu Ghraib, was a prison guard from 1996 to 2002 at SCI Greene Prison in Pennsylvania, which houses such death-row inmates as Mumia Abu-Jamal. He worked at the prison in 1998 when a hunger strike was initiated there against the abusive treatment by guards.

Elsewhere in the U.S., as at Maricopa County Jail in Arizona, inmates have been made to wear women's underwear as a form of humiliation, and at Virginia's Wallens Ridge Maximum Security Prison inmates have repeatedly been forced to wear black hoods for days at a time—just as at Abu Ghraib.

Also the man who directed the reopening of Saddam's Abu Ghraib prison for the U.S., Lane McCotter, was forced to resign as director of the Utah Department of Corrections in 1997 when an inmate died after being shackled to a restraining chair for 16 hours. As Robert L. Bastian wrote in THE LOS ANGELES TIMES of May 6, "The hard fact is that the U.S. installed in Iraq an American-style approach to prison management."

Numerous reports were made over the past year by Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International, and the Red Cross about prisoner abuse in Iraq and Afghanistan, but nothing was done to correct the situation. This is much like the situation here at home where cases of systematic torture and humiliation of prisoners goes unreported and unpunished.

Mildred Henry, an African American whose son Kilroy Watkins was falsely imprisoned for murder after being tortured into a confession by Chicago detective Jon Burge, recently stated, "I feel that what has happened to the prisoners in Iraq is the same as what has been going on here for years. I feel that George W. Bush is no different from Saddam Hussein" (see [Black-Red View column](#)).

The Bush administration has long opposed endorsing the International Convention Against Torture and it has refused to give the International Criminal Court jurisdiction over U.S. military personnel who commit human rights abuses. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld has often expressed disdain for the Geneva Conventions and in early 2002 he

dismissed complaints about the abuse of prisoners overseas by calling them “isolated pockets of international hyperventilation.” Given all this, is it any surprise that the soldiers at Abu Ghraib felt that they had license to act as they did?

A FAILED WAR

The rage now being felt by Iraqis against the U.S. does not stop with the abuses at Abu Ghraib. Even members of the U.S.-picked Iraqi Governing Council have complained bitterly that they were never consulted about the U.S.’s use of massive military force in Falluja, Najaf, Karbala and elsewhere, which according to the Associated Press have resulted in the deaths of over 1,300 Iraqi civilians.

The anger felt by Iraqis at the U.S. occupation does not mean they support fundamentalist clerics like Moktada al-Sadr who have taken up arms against the U.S. in Najaf; nor have they shown much sympathy for the insurgents in Falluja, many of whom are Saddam Hussein loyalists. On the contrary, in recent weeks the vast majority of political tendencies in the Shiite community have denounced al-Sadr and many Iraqis have condemned the desecration of the bodies of U.S. contractors by the Falluja militants and the beheading of U.S. civilian Nicholas Berg by Al Qaeda militants as barbaric and contrary to Islam.

Yet while most Iraqis oppose the reactionary fundamentalists who are attacking the U.S., they are firmly opposed to the U.S. occupation, which has killed many civilians, arrested thousands of innocent people without charges, sold off large portions of Iraq’s economy to U.S. multinationals, and accelerated Iraq’s massive destitution and unemployment.

As Iraqi Ahmad Abbas told THE NEW YORK TIMES on May 8, “We don’t support either side. We don’t want the Americans to kill the members of [al-Sadr’s] Mahdi Army, but we also don’t want the Mahdi Army to win.”

What has further inflamed anger at the U.S. in the region is Bush’s endorsement of Israeli Prime Minister Sharon’s plan to annex Jewish settlements on the West Bank in exchange for an Israeli “withdrawal” from the Gaza Strip. Sharon has made it clear that he plans to invest tens of millions of dollars in new West Bank settlements once Israel withdraws from Gaza, thereby fortifying Israel’s hold on the West Bank and making it harder for a viable Palestinian state to ever emerge.

Even the “withdrawal” from Gaza that Sharon is calling for (which his Likud Party has for now rejected) is not authentic, since Israel will still have the “right” to intervene there whenever it wants and it will control Gaza’s airspace, coastline and border with Egypt.

THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE IMBROGLIO

Bush's endorsement of Sharon's plan—which amounts to handing over control of Gaza to Hamas—is not as far apart from the Abu Ghraib scandal as it may appear. Gaza is a vast outdoor prison camp under Israeli control. Assassinations, beatings, and false imprisonment are daily occurrences.

Presidential hopeful John Kerry is hardly showing himself to be much of an alternative to Bush, as seen in his support of Bush's endorsement of Sharon's plan and his silence about the Abu Ghraib scandal—except to criticize Senator Edward Kennedy for saying “Shamefully we now learn that Saddam's torture chambers reopened under U.S. management.”

The events of the past two months in Iraq are of key importance, for they mark the first time in two decades that the U.S.'s drive to translate its global power into total dominance has run into a serious roadblock. Despite the refusal of Kerry and most of the Democrats to exploit this, a crucial opening has emerged for reversing the entire course of U.S. politics since the 1980s.

Yet we can be under no illusion that Bush & Co. will give up without a fight. Far too much is at stake for the U.S. political and military establishment to just walk away from its present predicament. The issue is not even Bush's presidency, but the entire U.S. drive for single world mastery. As Rumsfeld's trip to Iraq in mid-May to “rally the troops” and the administration's efforts to whitewash the Abu Ghraib scandal by blaming it on a handful of wayward soldiers shows, the administration will do whatever it can to recoup the ground it has lost over the past two months.

This makes it all the more imperative that the anti-war movement develop its independent power of action and mind by opposing not just the U.S. but also all reactionary forces opposing it by solidarizing with the indigenous revolutionary elements, in Iraq and in the U.S., that are reaching for a liberatory future.

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