

Editorial

America's Gulag

Full Spectrum Dominance versus Universal Human Rights

‘No one shall be subjected to torture or to cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.’

Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article Five

‘How do people get to this clandestine Archipelago? Hour by hour planes fly there, ships steam their course there, and trains thunder off to it...without a mark on them to tell of their destination. And at ticket windows or at travel bureaux...the employees would be astounded if you were to ask for a ticket to go there...Those who go to the Archipelago to administer it get there via the training schools of the Ministry...Those who go there to be guards are conscripted via the military conscription centres.

And those who...go there to die must get there solely and compulsorily via arrest.’

Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *The Gulag Archipelago*, Volume one, chapter one

Twenty miles west of Baghdad lies the Abu Ghraib prison, dank with the memories of Saddam Hussein's most notorious tortures. It was not closed down by the American liberators, but, after having been comprehensively looted immediately after the fall of the regime, stripped of doors, windows, and every moveable object, urgent reconstruction followed. The Americans had the floors tiled, the plumbing refurbished and the walls hosed down. Henceforth it was to be the latest jewel in the crown of the American gulag. Several thousand new prisoners were quickly admitted. They included teenage children and women. By Autumn 2003 they numbered a few thousand, loosely classified in three categories: common criminals; detainees suspected of ‘crimes against the coalition’; and a few ‘high value’ leaders of the uprising against the coalition forces.

Brigadier General Janis Karpinski was designated Commander of the prison, at the same time that she was given responsibility for two other jails. She disposed of a small army: three thousand four hundred army reservists, and eight battalions of regular soldiers. Like her, the reservists had no experience in the administration of prisons. When Major General Antonio M. Taguba came on the scene to investigate ‘failures of the army prison system’, General Karpinski was obviously nonplussed.

Taguba uncovered a remarkable history of abuse. In the last quarter of 2003, he identified ‘sadistic, blatant and wanton criminal’ behaviour. Taguba's report has been filtered through into the world press. Detainees had been beaten with broomsticks and chairs, male prisoners had been threatened with rape, or even sodomised with broom handles or chemical lights. Military Alsatian dogs had

been unleashed to frighten and maul some detainees. The repulsive photographs of these and other incidents were systematically used to intimidate detainees awaiting interrogation. Subsequently they were to shock the American legislators to whom they were shown.

It was hardly accidental that the management of Abu Ghraib was strengthened by bringing in the Commander of Guantanamo, Major General Geoffrey Miller¹. And Guantanamo was the inheritor of a large part of the prison population of Bagram in Afghanistan. Today it is alleged that some three hundred people are still detained in Bagram, north of Kabul, and others in Kandahar, Jalalabad and Asadabad. American Special Forces are said to have held other prisoners at Gardez and Khost. Bagram detainees have been continuously shackled, intentionally kept awake for extended periods of time, and forced to assume painful postures for extended periods, according to Human Rights Watch. Some Bagram prisoners were flown to Guantanamo, which imprisons six hundred or more people, brought in from outposts of the American gulag in many different locations. Others were relocated to a CIA interrogation centre in Kabul, according to the *Washington Post*, 'known as "the Pit", named for its despairing conditions'.

Two people were killed during interrogation in Afghanistan, and the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture has called for an investigation of the circumstances of their death. Twenty-two-year-old Dilawar and thirty-year-old Mullah Habibullah died during questioning, and their deaths are being treated by the American authorities as 'homicides'. Bagram, of course, is the site where Bob Woodward and other *Washington Post* reporters revealed in December 2002 the practice of 'torture-lite'. We reported at the time their allegations about the regular 'rendering' of prisoners for torture in earnest in the prisons of less fastidious nations, where penal practices were less inhibited by civilised standards.

Dilawar, says the Medical Foundation, 'died on December 10th, the day commemorating the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, championed by the US since 1948'.

The torture of prisoners, allegedly in pursuit of counter terrorist information, is a direct affront to the Universal Declaration, to the Geneva Conventions, and to all the other international instruments such as the UN Convention Against Torture, and the European Convention, which prohibit torture. But there have been persistent reports of aggravated physical and sexual abuse of prisoners at home in the United States, in Pennsylvania, Arizona and Virginia, where there has never been any pretence of 'seeking information'. Like the Iraqi prisoners, civil prisoners in Virginia have been compelled to wear hoods, while they also suffered beatings and were made to crawl on the ground. But the explanation of such treatment, unlike that in the new Gulag, has nothing to do with patriotism, but much to do with sadism. Nonetheless, techniques appear to be transferable.

Fox Butterfield reported in the *New York Times* that

'Some of the worst abuses have occurred in Texas, whose prisoners were under a Federal Consent Decree during much of the time President Bush was Governor, because of crowding and violence by guards against inmates. Judge William Wayne,

Justice of the Federal District Court, imposed the decree after finding that guards were allowing inmate gang leaders to buy and sell other inmates as slaves for sex.

The experts also pointed out that the man who directed the reopening of the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq last year, and trained the guards there, resigned under pressure as Director of the Utah Department of Corrections in 1997 after an inmate died while shackled to a restraining chair for sixteen hours. The inmate, who suffered from schizophrenia, was kept naked the whole time.

The Utah official, Lane McCotter, later became an executive of a private prison company, one of whose jails was under investigation by the Justice Department when he was sent to Iraq as part of a team of prison officials, prosecutors, and police chiefs, picked by Attorney General John Ashcroft to rebuild the country's criminal justice system.'

If civilian prisoners, the mentally ill, and other victims of the American penal system can be treated in this way, what hope is there for terrorist suspects in the far-flung and inaccessible prisons which have grown up in the America network of bases which girdle the world?

Such bases were numerous during the days of the Cold War. Some, like the immense installations at Okinawa, were unbelievably vast. But far from contracting with the disappearance of the red menace, they have proliferated geographically and grown in scale. Today they are emplaced in one hundred and thirty-two different countries, and have taken over entire islands, which may be closed to all non-military comers. Yesterday there was a noticeable adversary, but now there is none. Within this absence of military rivalry has been secreted the official military doctrine, of 'full spectrum dominance'.

The Department of Defence in the United States stated all this with remarkable economy, in its millennium declaration: *Joint Vision 20/20*:

'The ultimate goal of our military force is to accomplish the objectives directed by the National Command Authorities. For the joint force of the future, this goal will be achieved through full spectrum dominance – the ability of US forces operating unilaterally or in combination with multinational and interagency partners, to defeat any adversary and control any situation across the full range of military operations. The full range of operations includes maintaining a posture of strategic deterrence. It includes theatre engagement and presence activities. It includes conflict involving employment of strategic forces and weapons of mass destruction, major theatre wars, regional conflicts, and smaller-scale contingencies. It also includes those ambiguous situations residing between peace and war, such as peacekeeping and peace enforcement operations, as well as non-combat humanitarian relief operations and support to domestic authorities.

The label full spectrum dominance implies that US forces are able to conduct prompt, sustained, and synchronised operations with combinations of forces tailored to specific situations, and with access to and freedom to operate in all domains – space, sea, land, air, and information. Additionally, given the global nature of our interests and obligations, the United States must maintain its overseas presence forces and the ability to rapidly project power world-wide in order to achieve full spectrum dominance.'

Of course, this bold statement can be bent to different purposes, depending on the prevailing political ascendancy. It did not mean the same thing in the more consensual days of some democratic leaders that it does today in the heyday of George Bush's ferocious unilateralism. But at least one western Government outside the United States has been able to follow the transition from the consensual to unilateralism without too much difficulty. Listen to Jack Straw admonishing the House of Commons about the realities of modern military power:

'It is the United States which has the military power to act as the world's policeman, and only the United States. We live in a uni-polar world; the United States has a quarter of the world's wealth, the world's GDP, and it has stronger armed forces than the next 27 countries put together. So its predominance is huge. That is a fact. No one can gainsay it; no one can change it in the short or medium term. The choice we have to make in the international community is whether, in a uni-polar world, we want the only super-power to act unilaterally and we force them to act unilaterally or whether we work in such a way that they act within the multilateral institutions. What I say to France and Germany and all the other European Union colleagues is to take care, because just as America helps to define and influence our politics, so what we do in Europe helps to define and influence American politics. We will reap a whirlwind if we push the Americans into a unilateralist position in which they are the centre of this uni-polar world.'

The uncountable bases scattered all around the world certainly contribute to a kind of dominance. But full spectrum brutality does not. Far from it: the revelations about torture in Bagram, Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, as well as the allegations about rendition to Syria, Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia are arousing a worldwide revulsion which will underpin a very solid movement in defence of human rights.

Ken Coates

Notes

1. 'When Maj. Gen. Geoffrey D. Miller arrived in Iraq last August with a team of military police and intelligence specialists, the group was confronted by chaos. In one prison yard, a detainee was being held in a scorching hot shipping container as punishment, one team member recalled. An important communications antenna stood broken and unrepaired. Prisoners walked around barefoot, with sores on their feet and signs of untreated illness. Garbage was everywhere.

Perhaps most important, with the insurgency raging in Iraq, there was no effective system at the prisons for wringing intelligence from the prisoners, officials said. "They had no rules for interrogations," a military officer who travelled to Iraq with General Miller said. "People were escaping and getting shot. We tried to offer them some very basic recommendations."

According to information from a classified interview with the senior military intelligence officer at Abu Ghraib prison, General Miller's recommendations prompted a shift in the interrogation and detention procedures there. Military Intelligence officers were given greater authority in the prison, and military police guards were asked to

help gather information about the detainees. Whether those changes contributed to the abuse of prisoners that grew horrifically more serious last fall is now at the centre of the widening prison scandal.

General Miller's recommendations were based in large part on his command of the detention camp in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, where he won praise from the Pentagon for improving the flow of intelligence from terrorist suspects and prisoners of the Afghanistan war. In Iraq, General Miller's team gave officers at the prisons copies of the procedures that had been developed at Guantanamo to interrogate and punish the prisoners, according to the officer who travelled with him. Computer specialists and intelligence analysts explained the systems they had used in Cuba to process information and report it back to the United States.'

New York Times, Thursday 13 May 2004



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BERTRAND RUSSELL

In another February, on a Sunday afternoon eight years ago,
I went for you, and for a world that could reject your voice.

You were so frail, so ancient; yet stronger than us all.
You stood beside me on a platform in Trafalgar Square
among the toothless lions of a tyrannous imperial pride,
under the shadow of Nelson strutting in the falling snow.

Your head was bare, and your wild white hair
blazed like your mind in the wind of whirling flakes.
Your face, the mask of a tragic hawk,
was sad and bitter as you cried your warnings and defiance
at the armed forces of error, the police of Britain,
the criminal politicians, the priests of power, the insane
manufacturers of arms and poison gas and atom bombs,
inhuman profiteers all, sucking the blood of human misery.

You stood alone before the gathered heads of microphones,
tilted intelligently, raised like vipers, cobras about to strike.
– But like a saint, or like Apollo, god of poetry and music,
you charmed them into peace. You won their love with love,
with the fearless beauty of your mind, your noble voice.

Dear man, I remember your friendship for the lost and helpless,
and the grasp of your withered hand in mine that February day,
delicate but strong. I remember the wise humour of your smile,
twisted yet pure; the sparkle in your hooded, sombre eyes;
the deep lines in your cheeks; the nose like a mountain peak.
– And O, that great and simple brow – so vast, so calm, so full!

Most of all, I remember how you taught me to have courage
to defy the world in solitude; how to disarm
the dangerous stupidity of man, using weapons not of this world –
intellect with love; wit with pity; candour with compassion.

Now, in a foreign snow, my tears are falling for you,
and for the world, that did not heed your warning cries.

James Kirkup
Tokyo, February 3rd 1970

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is newly published by Spokesman Books (price £5).