

Court Rules Bush Administration Officials Can Be Sued for “War on Terror” Conduct

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For almost a decade and a half, the people behind the Bush administration’s shameful treatment of terrorism suspects have avoided punishment for their crimes, but that may be about to change.

The courts have had their say and have ruled that former Bush administration officials can, in fact, be sued for how they conducted the “war on terror.”

The Second Circuit Court of Appeals made that pretty much official on Friday when it refused to hear a challenge to its earlier ruling in the case of Turkmen v. Ashcroft. That case involves hundreds of Arab, Muslim or South Asian men who were detained and then abused by our government in the weeks following 9/11.

Some of them were beaten by security guards and kept in solitary confinement, which the United Nations considers a form of torture. After they were released, these men sued the people they say authorized their detentions – people like former Attorney General John Ashcroft and former FBI director Robert Mueller.

A district court initially blocked their claims, but in June, the Second Circuit Court allowed them, saying that Ashcroft, Mueller and company could be sued. The government then made one more last ditch push to protect the Bush administration, but that effort failed last Friday when the Second Circuit rejected it.

Everyone else who authorized and participated in the illegal roundup of hundreds of innocent men after 9/11, from high-up government officials on down, is now fair game for a lawsuit.

This is great news.

Although President Obama has done some things for some of the worst abuses of the Bush administration, we’ve never had a true national reckoning with what actually went on from 2001 to 2009.

Bush, Cheney and company took us into some very, very dark places after 9/11, and the detention of hundreds of innocent people solely on the basis of their race or religion is just the tip of the iceberg of what the Bush administration did.

They lied us into illegal wars that killed thousands of Americans and millions of Iraqis and Afghan civilians. They also tortured terrorism suspects, many of whom turned out to be innocent, in violation of international *and* US law.

Oh yeah, and they also created the Guantánamo Bay detention center, which, to this day, remains one of the best recruitment tools in the world for groups like Al-Qaeda and ISIS.

The list goes on.

Obviously, the Obama administration doesn't exactly have a stellar record when it comes to the "war on terror" either, the drone wars being just one example. But even so, the Bush administration still bears the ultimate responsibility for taking our country down the path we're still on a full decade-and-a-half after 9/11. And that's why we need to prosecute everyone in Bush administration who participated in these crimes - Bush, Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, Ashcroft - I mean everyone, right now.

Like any self-proclaimed democracy, the United States can and should be a moral force for good in the world. But it can't be one when it lets the biggest war criminals in its history get off scot-free. The decision by the Second Circuit Court of Appeals allowing lawsuits against people like former Attorney General John Ashcroft is a step in the right direction. It opens up a new path for our country, a path that offers us the chance for a national redemption of sorts.

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