

Gag Reflex

U.S. doctors force-feeding captives on hunger strike in Bush's concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay

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Global Research, January 15, 2006
15 January 2006

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

If President George W. Bush shows no qualms about violating the 217-year-old U.S. Constitution or the 791-year-old Magna Carta, why should we be surprised to find that he is now violating the 2,400-year-old Hippocratic Oath?

And yet this week's revelation of how U.S. doctors are force-feeding captives on hunger strike in Bush's concentration camp at Guantanamo Bay still has the power to shock and sicken — not just from the savage act itself, but also for the wider moral defeat it represents: another open embrace of raw brutality, another step in America's accelerating plunge into vicious despotism.

News of the hunger strike has been trickling out from the ever-incurious U.S. media for months. Indeed, Pentagon warlord Donald Rumsfeld even joked about prisoners "going on a diet." But the full scope of the strike — and the unethical methods being used to quash it — only emerged this week in *The Observer*, which obtained legal affidavits from the Army doctors involved in this "torture lite." The strike, which began last August with a handful of captives, has now spread to 81 prisoners trying to starve themselves to death.

Men driven to such desperation make bad PR for their captors — especially a blustering pipsqueak who likes to pass himself off as a God-blessed beacon of goodness and freedom. So the strikers are being strapped down and force-fed by tubes shoved through their noses and crammed down into their stomachs. This daily process leaves them bleeding and retching, according to sworn testimony from the concentration camp's hospital chief, Captain John Edmondson.

The good doctor defended the practice as humane, noting that his medicos grease the captives' nostrils with lubricant, and use only "soft and flexible" 3-millimeter hoses — an amelioration of their previous technique: stuffing 4.8-millimeter hard-rubber tubes down nose and gullet in order to pump gruel into a prisoner's belly more quickly. Yet despite the Christ-like tenderness of this treatment, Edmondson is now being sued in California, his native state, for unprofessional conduct. It seems that U.S. doctors are legally bound by the 1975 World Medical Association Tokyo Declaration, which explicitly forbids force-feeding under any circumstances.

Ah, but what are laws, treaties and oaths in our brave new world? There are of course no inherent legal protections or human rights in the Bushist philosophy of power. Like his brother in blood, Osama bin Laden, Bush recognizes no law beyond his own will. Anyone he designates an "enemy" — without any charges or evidence whatsoever — becomes sub-human, a piece of trash. And so it is with the Guantanamo captives. None of them has been

charged with any crime, as The Observer notes; none has been shown any evidence justifying their imprisonment, or knows how long they will be held. Many of the hunger strikers have been chained in this agonizing limbo for more than four years, a living death guaranteed to induce torment, madness and fatal despair.

Yet it has been thoroughly documented — sometimes by the Pentagon itself — that numerous “Terror War” prisoners are innocent men (and children) who have been falsely accused through incompetent intelligence work, or even sold into captivity by bounty hunters paid by eager Bushist agents, as The Washington Post reports. We know too, by the regime’s own admission, that all “high-value” terrorist targets are held in secret CIA prisons hidden around the globe, not at Guantanamo.

But last week Bush turned the screws even tighter on his Gitmo trash, signing a law that strips the captives of the ancient right of habeas corpus, which predates the Magna Carta. They are to have no access to the legal system, not even a simple declaration of why they are being held. What’s more, last week Bush also asserted his right to ignore an anti-torture law he had just signed, The Boston Globe reports. Even as he reaped kudos for his apparent approval of the mild restraints on torture pushed by Senator John McCain, Bush simultaneously issued a “signing statement” — an unconstitutional “presidential interpretation” of law — declaring that he can set aside the law if he feels it conflicts with his “authority as commander-in-chief” at any point. (Cries of “Amen, brother!” were immediately heard in that quadrant of hell where Hitler and Stalin sit gnawing on the anuses of rats.)

No doubt any spot of legal bother about force-feeding captives will be dismissed under the rubric of this unbridled “authority,” perhaps with the help of Supreme Court nominee Samuel Alito, a longtime apologist for authoritarian rule by unrestrained presidents. After all, it was Alito himself who concocted the law-gutting device of the presidential “signing statement” when he was a legal factotum in the Ronald Reagan White House, The Washington Post reports.

But just how far does the “Commander’s” torture authority reach? To the crushing of an innocent child’s testicles. So says John Yoo, the former deputy assistant attorney general who helped craft the official White House “torture memos” that justified any torture short of permanent maiming or death — and even countenanced the latter if it was “unintentional.” Yoo also helped devise the regime’s crank philosophy of the “unitary executive” — that is, dictatorship for a “war president.” In response to a question at a public debate last month, Yoo declared that Bush could override any law or treaty and order his goons to crush the testicles of a prisoner’s child in the name of “national security,” commentator Andrew Sullivan reports.

Crushed testicles. Torture. Tyranny. Aggressive war. Bush better start developing a taste for rat rectums right away. He’s going to need it.

Annotations

[Scandal of Force-Fed Prisoners](#)

The Observer, Jan. 8, 2006

[Kinsley on Torture](#)

Andrewsullivan.com, Dec. 17, 2005

[Who is Watching the Watchmen?](#)

The Daily Cardinal, Dec. 14, 2005

[Bush Adviser Says President Has Legal Power to Torture Children](#)

Information Clearinghouse, Jan. 8, 2006

[Alito Once Made Case For Presidential Power](#)

The Washington Pos, Jan. 2, 2006

[George Bush's Rough Justice](#)

The Guardian, Jan. 12, 2006

[Rumsfeld Defends Guantanamo Decision](#)

Associated Press, Nov. 2, 2005

[Amnesty Releases New Gitmo Torture Testimony](#)

Amnesty International, Jan. 10, 2006

[NSA, FISA and the DNA of Tyranny](#)

Empire Burlesque, Jan. 11, 2006

[3 GOP Senators Blast Bush Bid to Bypass Torture Ban](#)

Boston Globe, Jan. 5, 2006

[Wrongful Imprisonment: Anatomy of a CIA Mistake](#)

Washington Post, Dec. 3, 2005

[CIA Holds Terror Suspects in Secret Prisons](#)

Washington Post, Nov. 2, 2005

[Seized, held, tortured: six tell same tale](#)

The Guardian, Dec. 6, 2005

[Empire Burlesque, Dec. 28, 2005](#)

[The Hippocratic Oath](#)

BBC, Aug. 20, 2003

[A Brief History of Habeas Corpus](#)

BBC, March 9, 2005

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