

Human Rights: the People vs the UN

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Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [United Nations](#)

As the US government is re-elected to the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Committee Against Torture hears a complaint against Bush.

The recent death of Iranian dissident blogger Sattar Beheshti in police custody was a sad event. All human life is precious. "If anyone kills a person unless in retribution for murder or spreading corruption in the land – it is as if he kills all humanity," states the Quran. An investigation by the Tehran prosecutor, the head of Tehran police and the head of Tehran prisons was ordered by Iranian parliament and Beheshti's interrogators were hauled on the carpet.

At the same time, the US was elected to a second three-year term on the 47-member United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC). President Bush boycotted the HRC for criticizing Israel too much, but Obama joined in 2010 to 'improve' it. US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice welcomed Washington's re-election this week, saying that the HRC "has delivered real results", citing its criticism of Syria, though she criticized the rights council's continued "excessive and unbalanced focus on Israel".

US emphasis on the HRC is on freedom of expression, religion, and the rights of women and gays, and of course criticism of Iran. Beheshti's case will surely be raised by the US rep in the near future.

The US government-funded Freedom House huffed that seven of the countries on the HRC – Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, Gabon, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, UAE, and Venezuela – are "unqualified for membership" on a body that requires members to "uphold the highest standards regarding human rights", and that the qualifications of Brazil, Kenya, and Sierra Leone were "questionable".

What about the US 'qualifications'? During its first term, the US

- *continued its illegal occupations of Afghanistan and Iraq (1.5 million Iraqis have been killed as a result of the US invasion in 2003)

- *used its veto at the UN to condemn Israeli human rights violations (the 2009 invasion of Gaza killed 1400)

- *accelerated its use of drone strikes in Pakistan, Yemen and Somalia (3,400 have been killed by drones in Pakistan alone since 2004)

- *persecuted Wikileaks' Julian Assange for his attempts to give substance to the concept of 'freedom of expression' in the interests of curbing US war fever.

The ongoing trial of US Army Staff Sergeant Robert Bales, accused of killing 16 Afghan villagers – "heinous and despicable crimes" according to the prosecutor – makes you stop and think: each day, US troops, carry out similar mass executions in Afghanistan, Yemen, Somalia, and, in connivance with Israel, in Palestine.

The alleged comment by Stalin to Churchill is chillingly apropos: The death of one man is a tragedy, the death of millions is a statistic.

Coincidentally, as Rice demanded less criticism of Israel in the HRC, the Israeli army launched another attack on Gaza, with 21 Palestinian deaths so far, including Hamas deputy military chief Ahmed Al-Jaabari.. Earlier attempts to assassinate him include an air raid in 2004 which killed his eldest son, his brother and several of his cousins. (Rest assured, the US HRC rep will do his/her best to keep this off the agenda.)

But though the slaughter and torture in Afghanistan and Gaza continues on a daily basis, with hardly a peep from the media, the force of world opinion has meant that US leaders commanding the likes of Bales, such as Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld, and virtually all Israeli leaders, now have to be more careful about where they go. People around the world who refuse to consider the death of millions as an inconsequential statistic are waiting to enforce citizens' arrests.

This week, four survivors of US torture filed a complaint against Canada with the United Nations Committee Against Torture for the country's failure to investigate and prosecute Bush during his visit to British Columbia last year, the first such complaint filed with the UN Committee. As a signatory to the 1984 Convention Against Torture, Canada has an obligation to investigate and prosecute a torture suspect on its soil, argued the Canadian Centre for International Justice (CCIJ) and the US-based Center for Constitutional Rights.

Canada's attorney general refused to consider the CCIJ's call to conduct a criminal investigation during Bush's visit last year, and the British Columbia provincial attorney general quickly shut down a private criminal prosecution. Bush cancelled a trip to Switzerland last year after he heard of plans for a similar prosecution and the apparent unwillingness of Swiss authorities to stop it.

Citizen diplomacy is coming alive. So far, there is no such campaign to try Obama for continuing the drone operations that kill civilians and non-civilians, men women and children, indiscriminately. However, popular support for Assange convinced Ecuador to give him asylum. As for Israel, its actions are increasing resistance rather than quelling it. Hamas militants in Gaza vowed to continue on the path of resistance, asserting that "the occupation opened the gates of hell." Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi vowed that such violations of human rights would no longer be tolerated by Egypt, as they were in the past 30 years under US ally ex-President Hosni Mubarak.

The US and Israel have become infamous for their eagerness to torture and/or kill those they don't like. US and Israel attacks have killed dozens, if not hundreds of Beheshtis daily for decades, and not at home, but as part of their aggressive wars abroad. Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and Operation Cast Lead may have been crowded out of western media, but the crimes committed there will not go away.

A US Viet Nam War veteran at a Remembrance Day rally in Toronto this week spoke of "the heaps of corpses generated by modern industrial warfare. Every time I attended such ceremonies in the US, I speak up for the millions of Asians who died in that criminal folly. We slaughtered millions."

But this is merely the US agenda, just as US distaste for criticism of Israel on the HRC is, in preference for Iran. Just as is the US penchant for torture and killing, borrowed from Israel

and which blossomed under Bush.

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Canadian Eric Walberg is known worldwide as a journalist specializing in the Middle East, Central Asia and Russia. A graduate of University of Toronto and Cambridge in economics, he has been writing on East-West relations since the 1980s. He has lived in both the Soviet Union and Russia, and then Uzbekistan, as a UN adviser, writer, translator and lecturer. Presently a writer for the foremost Cairo newspaper, Al Ahram, he is also a regular contributor to Counterpunch, Dissident Voice, Global Research, Al-Jazeera and Turkish Weekly, and is a commentator on Voice of the Cape radio. Eric Walberg was a moderator and speaker at the Leaders for Change Summit in Istanbul in 2011.

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