

Reporters without Borders, follows in Washington's steps and legitimizes torture

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Robert Ménard, secretary general of the Paris based organization Reporters without Borders (RSF) since 1985, is a professional media figure who claims to defend “freedom of the press” and wraps himself with a humanist discourse greatly appreciated by public opinion. Thanks to the collusion of the media, Ménard has become an unavoidable figure in the world of the press.



Nonetheless, his actions don't meet with unanimous approval. The flagrant lack of impartiality which RSF shows has been criticized many times. The French organization financed by economic and financial corporations as well as by the United States, as its secretary general has publicly admitted, has carried out media campaigns curiously similar to the political agenda of the White House. Thus RSF, with the pretext of defending freedom of the press, has repeatedly shown no mercy with Cuba (1), supported the coup d'état against Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez in April 2002 (2), implicitly approved the bloody invasion of Iraq in 2003 (3) and legitimized the coup d'état against President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in Haiti (4). Now, RSF carries out a spectacular media campaign against China and the Olympic Games in Beijing (5).

The ideological similarity between RSF and the Bush administration is evident to the extent that one questions what Robert Menard's true objectives really are. The scandals of Guantánamo, Abu Graib and the CIA's secret jails throughout the world have shown that U.S. troops don't hesitate to use torture to obtain their goals. The entire international community has unanimously condemned these inhuman and unjustifiable methods.

In October 2006 the U.S. Congress took the first step and approved a law that legalizes torture, a flagrant violation of the very principles of democracy. The Republican majority as well as several elected Democrats of the House of Representatives and Senate authorized the use of evidence obtained under torture against the “illegal enemy combatant.” The text, titled “law of military commissions, 2006,” recognizes the existence of secret courts to judge any alien suspected of attacking United States interests. The defendant won't have access to a lawyer or know the charges against him. Additionally, the evidence presented against him will remain secret. Or course, he will also be detained without the right to be brought before a judge, and all of that indefinitely. He will not be able to denounce the illegality of his detention or the torture he might have been the victim of (6).

The law also gives the U.S. president “the authority to interpret the meaning and the application of the Geneva conventions” which prohibits torture. These will not be able to be

used “as a source of law before any court of the United States.” Section V of the law stipulates, “no person may invoke the Geneva Conventions or any protocols thereto in any habeas corpus or other civil action or proceeding to which the United States, or a current or former officer, employee, member of the Armed Forces, or other agent of the United States is a party as a source of rights in any court of the United States or its States or territories.” Additionally, “No court, justice, or judge shall have jurisdiction to hear or consider an application for a writ of habeas corpus filed by or on behalf of an alien detained by the United States who has been determined by the United States to have been properly detained as an enemy combatant or is awaiting such determination.” (7)

Not only is this law poisonous to freedom, essentially totalitarian, it represents a threat for any citizen of the world who isn't a citizen of the United States, but grants complete impunity to those responsible for cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment. The European Union and France in particular have maintained a scandalous silence with respect to this law. What would have happened if China, Cuba, Iran, Russia or Venezuela had adopted a similar law? Who can still speak of the United States as of a model of democracy?

During the radio program “Contre-expertise” hosted by Xavier de la Porte on France Culture, August 16, 2007, Robert Ménard, the self-proclaimed defender of human rights and journalists, followed the steps of his sponsors and legitimized the use of torture, saying some extremely alarming things. Evoking the murder of U.S. journalist Daniel Pearl, he emphasized that it was legitimate to torture suspects in order to save the life of innocents, reviving the argument of the most horrifying dictatorships and, of course, of the Bush administration(8).

Ménard goes further since he even legitimizes the use of torture against family members of kidnappers, that is against innocent people. “If my daughter were kidnapped, there would be no limit, I'm telling you, I'm telling you, there would be no limit on torture.” Here is an extract of what the secretary general of RSF said:

“The Pakistani police kidnap families, listen to me, families of the kidnappers and torture these families of those kidnappers in order to obtain information.

They are going to obtain information. They will arrive too late to save Daniel. Do you know how his throat was cut and under what conditions...?

Where do we stop? Shall we accept this logic that consists of... since we could do it in some cases, ‘you kidnap, we kidnap; you mistreat, we mistreat; you torture, we torture ...?’

What justifies...? Perhaps in order to free somebody, can we go there? It is a real question.

That is real life, it is that, what François just said: we are no longer in ideas, it is war, we are no longer dealing with principals. I don't what to think. Because this happens to Marianne Pearl, I'm not saying, I'm not saying that they made a mistake because she thought that it was appropriate to do it, that it was necessary to do that, that her husband had to be saved, she was pregnant... for the sake of the baby that was going to be born, everything was permitted.

And it was absolutely necessary to save him and if it was necessary to attack a certain number of people, they had to attack a certain number of people, physically attack them, you understand, threatening them and torturing them, even though we might have to kill

some.

I don't know, I am lost. Because sometimes I don't know where you have to stop, where you have to put on the brakes. What is acceptable and what is unacceptable? And at the same time, for the families of those that were kidnapped, because many times they are the people we talk to first, in Reporters without Borders; legitimately, I, if my daughter were kidnapped there would be no limit, I tell you, I tell you, there would be no limit on torture"(9).

How can one try to defend human rights when a practice as abominable and inhuman as torture is justified? What remains of Robert Menard's and Reporters without Border's credibility - the two are so intimately connected that it is impossible to disassociate them—when they justify the unjustifiable? The secretary general of RSF showed his true face. He doesn't defend freedom of the press but the hateful practices of the CIA. But, is it really surprising when it is financed by the National Endowment for Democracy (10), which is no more than an Agency front according to the New York Times? (11)

Translated by Dana Lubow.

[Article in french](#), September 4, 2007.

Notes

(1) Salim Lamrani, «Reporteros Sin Fronteras y sus contradicciones», Rebelión, 27 de septiembre de 2006, <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=38136> (sitio consultado el 2 de septiembre de 2007); Reporteros Sin Fronteras, [«Lettre ouverte à ses détracteurs»](#), Réseau Voltaire, 12 de septiembre de 2006. (sitio consultado el 12 de septiembre de 2006).

(2) Salim Lamrani, «La guerra de desinformación de Reporteros Sin Fronteras contra Venezuela», Rebelión, 6 de febrero de 2007, <http://www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=46082> (sitio consultado el 2 de septiembre de 2007); Reporteros Sin Fronteras, «Un journaliste a été tué, trois autres ont été blessés et cinq chaînes de télévision brièvement suspendues», 12 de abril de 2002. www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=1109 (sitio consultado el 13 noviembre 2006).

(3) Reporteros Sin Fronteras, «Irak - rapport annuel 2004». http://www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=9884 (sitio consultado el 18 de julio de 2005) ; Reporteros Sin Fronteras, «La liberté de la presse retrouvée: un espoir à entretenir», julio 2004. www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=10888 (sitio consultado el 23 de abril de 2005).

(4) Reporteros Sin Fronteras, «La liberté de la presse retrouvé : un espoir à entretenir», julio de 2004. www.rsf.org/article.php3?id_article=10888 (sitio consultado el 23 de abril de 2005); Salim Lamrani, «Reporteros Sin Fronteras con sus contradicciones», op. cit.

(5) Reporteros Sin Fronteras, «Pékin 2008. Chine: La plus grande prison du monde pour les journalistes et les internautes», sin fecha. http://www.rsf.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=171 (sitio consultado el 2 de septiembre de 2007).

(6) Michel Muller, «Quand Washington légalise la torture», L'Humanité, 16 de octubre de 2006.

(7) Ibid.

(8) Jean-Noël Darde, «[Quand Robert Ménard, de RSF, légitime la torture](#)», 26 de agosto de 2007, (sitio consultado el 28 de agosto 2007).

(9) Ibid.

(10) Robert Ménard, «Forum de discussion avec Robert Ménard», Le Nouvel Observateur, 18 de abril de 2005. www.nouvelobs.com/forum/archives/forum_284.html (sitio consultado el 22 de abril de 2005).

(11) John M. Broder, «Political Meddling by Outsiders: Not New for U.S.», The New York Times, 31 de marzo de 1997, p. 1.

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