

Torture Continues under Obama

By [Washington's Blog](#)

Global Research, May 19, 2009

[Washington's Blog](#) 19 May 2009

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#), [Law and Justice](#)

While torture under the Bush administration was horrible, at least it has stopped. Right?

Wrong.

Jeremy Scahill (the reporter who broke most of the stories on Blackwater) [says](#) that a military police unit at Guantanamo regularly brutalizes unarmed prisoners, including gang-beating them, breaking their bones, gouging their eyes and dousing them with chemicals.

Specifically, whenever there is “disobedience” by the detainees – which can include praying, or having 2 styrofoam cups in their cell instead of 1, or refusing medication or failing to immediately respond when spoken to – the “Immediate Reaction Force” (IRF) is sent in.

Scahill [describes](#) what happens next:

When an IRF team is called in, its members are dressed in full riot gear, which some prisoners and their attorneys have compared to “Darth Vader” suits. Each officer is assigned a body part of the prisoner to restrain: head, right arm, left arm, left leg, right leg...

[The IRF teams then mete out brutal punishment, including] gang beating them, forcing their heads into toilets, breaking bones, gouging their eyes, squeezing their testicles, urinating on a prisoner’s head, banging their heads on concrete floors and hog-tying them — sometimes leaving prisoners tied in excruciating positions for hours on end...

[One prisoner was sprayed directly in the eyes with mace and gouged in the eyes and was then refused medical treatment, which resulted in permanent blindness in one eye. He also endured a “sexual attack”.

Another prisoner had a third prisoner’s feces spread on him.]

There was also torture using water:

The ERF team came into the cell with a water hose under very high pressure. He was totally shackled, and they would hold his head fixed still. They would force water up his nose until he was suffocating and would scream for them to stop. This was done with medical staff present, and they would join in.

Scahill says that these are not “a few bad apples”:

The IRF teams “were fully approved at the highest levels [of the Bush

administration], including the Secretary of Defense and with outside consultation of the Justice Department,” says Scott Horton, one of the leading experts on U.S. Military and Constitutional law. This force “was designed to disabuse the prisoners of any idea that they would be free from physical assault while in U.S. custody,” he says. “They were trained to brutally punish prisoners in a brief period of time, and ridiculous pretexts were taken to justify” the beatings.

Scahill’s allegations are being confirmed by the Spanish torture investigation. Indeed:

“Up to 15 people attempted to commit suicide at Camp Delta due to the abuses of the IRF officials,” according to the Spanish investigation.

One particular incident shows how brutal the IRF interrogators are:

In January 2003, Sgt. Sean Baker [an active-duty U.S. soldier and Gulf War veteran] was ordered to participate in an IRF training drill at Guantánamo where he would play the role of an uncooperative prisoner. Sgt. Baker says he was ordered by his superior to take off his military uniform and put on an orange jumpsuit like those worn by prisoners. He was told to yell out the code word “red” if the situation became unbearable, or he wanted his fellow soldiers to stop.

According to sworn statements, upon entering his cell, IRF members thought they were restraining an actual prisoner. As Sgt. Baker later described:

They grabbed my arms, my legs, twisted me up and, unfortunately, one of the individuals got up on my back from behind and put pressure down on me while I was face down. Then he — the same individual — reached around and began to choke me and press my head down against the steel floor. After several seconds, 20 to 30 seconds, it seemed like an eternity because I couldn’t breathe. When I couldn’t breathe, I began to panic and I gave the code word I was supposed to give to stop the exercise, which was ‘red.’ ... That individual slammed my head against the floor and continued to choke me. Somehow I got enough air. I muttered out: ‘I’m a U.S. soldier. I’m a U.S. soldier.’

Sgt. Baker said his head was slammed once more, and after groaning “I’m a U.S. soldier” one more time, “I heard them say, ‘Whoa, whoa, whoa,’ you know, like ... he was telling the other guy to stop.”

According to CBS:

Bloodied and disoriented, Baker somehow made it back to his unit, and his first thought was to get hold of the videotape. “I said, ‘Go get the tape,’ ” recalls Baker. “ ‘They’ve got a tape. Go get the tape.’ My squad leader went to get the tape.”

Every extraction drill at Guantanamo was routinely videotaped, and the tape of this drill would show what happened. But Baker says his squad leader came back and said, “There is no tape.”

The New York Times later reported that the military “says it can’t find a videotape that is believed to have been made of the incident.” Baker was soon diagnosed with traumatic brain injury. He began suffering seizures, sometimes 10 to 12 per day.

“This was just one typical incident, and Baker was recognizable as an American,” says Horton. “But it gives a good flavor of what the Gitmo detainees went through, which was generally worse.”

If they did that to a U.S. soldier during a training exercise, one who was given a special code word to have the interrogation stop, what they did to actual detainees had to have been much worse.

The torture by IRF teams is continuing under the Obama administration. In fact, it is actually getting worse:

The Center for Constitutional Rights released a report titled “Conditions of Confinement at Guantánamo: Still In Violation of the Law,” which found that abuses continued. In fact, one Guantanamo lawyer, Ahmed Ghappour, said that his clients were reporting “a ramping up in abuse” since Obama was elected.

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