

War Criminal Donald Rumsfeld Personifies American Society

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When Donald Rumsfeld used to hold press conferences about the Iraq war, the press corps would giggle at the clever ways in which he refused to actually say anything or answer any questions.

In a new film about Rumsfeld called *The Unknown Knowns*, the aging criminal is occasionally confronted with evidence that what he's just said is false. He maintains a frozen grin and acts as if nothing has happened. The film's director, interviewing Rumsfeld, never presses the truly uncomfortable points.

The closest the film comes to asking Rumsfeld about the wrongness of launching a war on Iraq is with the question "Wouldn't it have been better not to go there at all?" Not "Wasn't it illegal?" Not "Do you believe 1.4 million Iraqis were killed or only 0.5 million?" Not "When you sleep at your home at the Mt. Misery plantation where they used to beat and whip slaves like Frederick Douglass how do you rank the mass slaughter you engaged in against the crimes of past eras?" Not "Was it at least inappropriate to smirk and claim that 'freedom is untidy' while people were destroying a society?" And to the only question that was asked, Rumsfeld is allowed to get away with replying "I guess time will tell."

Then Rumsfeld effectively suggests that time has already told. He says that candidate Barack Obama opposed Bush-era tactics and yet has kept them in place, including the PATRIOT Act, lawless imprisonment, etc. He might have added that President Obama has maintained the right to torture and rendition even while largely replacing torture with murder via drone. Most crucially for himself, he might have noted that Obama has violated the Convention Against Torture by barring the prosecution of those responsible for recent violations. But Rumsfeld's point is clear when he notes that Obama's conduct "has to validate" everything the previous gang did wrong.

I've long included Rumsfeld on a list of [the top 50 Bush-era war criminals](#), with this description:

"Donald Rumsfeld lives in Washington, D.C., and at former slave-beating plantation "Mount Misery" on Maryland's Eastern Shore near St. Michael's and a home belonging to Dick Cheney, as well as at an estate outside Taos, New Mexico. He took part in White House meetings personally overseeing and [approving torture](#) by authorizing the use of specific torture techniques including waterboarding on specific people, and was in fact a leading liar in [making the false case](#) for an illegal war of aggression, and pushed for wars of aggression for years as a participant in the [Project for the New American Century](#)."

The National Lawyers Guild [noted years ago](#):

“It was recently revealed that Dick Cheney, Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, Colin Powell, George Tenet, and John Ashcroft met in the White House and personally oversaw and approved the torture by authorizing specific torture techniques including waterboarding. President Bush admitted he knew and approved of their actions. ‘They are all liable under the War Crimes Act and the Torture Statute,’ Professor [Marjorie] Cohn testified. ‘Under the doctrine of command responsibility, commanders, all the way up the chain of command to the commander-in-chief, are liable for war crimes if they knew or should have known their subordinates would commit them, and they did nothing to stop or prevent it. The Bush officials ordered the torture after seeking legal cover from their lawyers.’”

This doesn’t come up in the movie. Rumsfeld does shamelessly defend abusing and torturing prisoners, and maintains that torturing people protects “the American people,” but he passes the buck to the Department of Justice and the CIA and is never asked about the White House meetings described above. When it comes to Abu Ghraib he says he thought “something terrible happened on my watch” as if he’d had nothing to do with it, as if his casual approval of torture and scrawled notes about how he stands up all day and so can prisoners played no part. (He also claims nobody was killed and there was just a bit of nudity and sadism, despite the fact that photos of guards smiling with corpses have been made public — the movie doesn’t mention them.) Asked about abuses migrating from Guantanamo to Iraq, Rumsfeld cites a report to claim they didn’t. The director then shows Rumsfeld that the report he cited says that in fact torture techniques migrated from Guantanamo to Iraq. Rumsfeld says he thinks that’s accurate, as if he’d never said anything else. Rumsfeld also says that in the future he believes public officials won’t write so many memos.

The central lie in Rumsfeld’s mind and our society and *The Unknown Knowns* is probably that irrational foreigners are out to get us. Rumsfeld recounts being asked at his confirmation hearing to become Secretary of So-Called Defense “What do you go to sleep worried about?” The answer was not disease or climate change or car accidents or environmental pollution or starvation any actually significant danger. The answer was not that the United States continues antagonizing the world and creating enemies. There was no sense of urgency to halt injustices or stop arming dictators or pull back from bases that outrage local populations. Instead, Rumsfeld feared another Pearl Harbor — the same thing his Project for the New American Century had said would be needed in order to justify overthrowing governments in the Middle East.

Rumsfeld describes Pearl Harbor in the movie, lying that no one had imagined the possibility of a Japanese attack there. [The facts refute that endlessly repeated lie](#). Then Rumsfeld tells the same lie about 9-11, calling it “a failure of imagination.” What we’re going through is a failure of memory. These words “FBI information ... indicates patterns of suspicious activity in this country consistent with preparations for hijackings or other types of attacks, including recent surveillance of federal buildings in New York” appeared in an August 6, 2001, briefing of President George W. Bush titled “Bin Laden Determined to Strike in U.S.”

The movie does a decent job on Rumsfeld’s pre-war lies. Rumsfeld tells the camera that nobody in the Bush administration ever tied Saddam Hussein to 9-11. Then the film shows old footage of Rumsfeld himself doing just that. Similar footage could have been shown of

numerous officials on numerous occasions. Rumsfeld has clearly been allowed such levels of impunity that delusions have taken over. He rewrites the past in his head and expects everyone else to obediently follow along. As of course Eric Holder's Justice Department has done.

Rumsfeld, in the film, dates the certainty of the decision to invade Iraq to January 11, 2003. This of course predates months of himself and Bush and Cheney pretending no decision had been made, including the January 31, 2003, White House press conference with Bush and British Prime Minister Tony Blair at which they said they were working to avoid war, after Bush had just privately proposed to Blair [a string of cockamamie ideas that might get a war started](#).

Bizarrely, the film's director Errol Morris asks Rumsfeld why they didn't just assassinate Saddam Hussein instead of attacking the nation of Iraq. He does not ask why the U.S. didn't obey the law. He does not ask about Hussein's willingness to just leave if he could keep \$1 billion, as Bush told Spanish president Jose Maria Aznar that Hussein had offered. And even the question asked, Rumsfeld refuses to answer until he makes Morris complicit. Morris had used the word "they," as in "why didn't *they* just assassinate him?" whereas he clearly should have used the word "you," but Rumsfeld makes him repeat the question using the word "we" before providing an answer. We? We were lied to by a criminal government. We don't take the blame as servants to a flag. Are you kidding? But Morris dutifully asks "Why didn't we just assassinate ... ?"

Rumsfeld replies that "We don't assassinate" and tries hard not to grin. Morris says "but you tried" referring to an attempt to bomb Hussein's location. Rumsfeld excuses that by saying it was "an act of war." This is the same line that human rights groups take on drone murders. (We can't be sure if they're illegal, because President Obama may have written a note and hid it in his shoe that says it's all a part of a war, and war makes murder OK.)

Rumsfeld blames Iraq for not avoiding being attacked. He pretends Iraq pretended to have weapons, even while blaming Iraq for not turning over the weapons that it claimed not to have (and didn't have). The veteran liar lies that he thought he was using the best "intelligence" when he lied about Iraqi weapons, and then passes the buck to Colin Powell.

Rumsfeld and the nation that produced him didn't turn wrong only in the year 2001. Rumsfeld avoided Watergate by being off to Brussels as ambassador to NATO, a worse crime one might argue than Watergate, or at least than Nixon's recording of conversations — which is all that this movie discusses, and which Rumsfeld describes as "a mistake." Asked if he learned anything from the U.S. war that killed 4 million Vietnamese, Rumsfeld says "Some things work out, some things don't." I think he expected applause for that line. On the topic of meeting with Saddam Hussein in the 1980s, Rumsfeld is allowed to describe his mistake as having been filmed shaking hands with the man he calls a dictator. But he's never asked about having supported Hussein and armed and assisted him, including with weapons that would later (despite having been destroyed) form the basis of the pretended cause of war.

After giving the fun-loving sociopaths of fictional dramas a bad name for two hours, this real person, Donald Rumsfeld, blames war on "human nature" and expresses pretended sadness at future U.S. war deaths, as if 95% of the victims of U.S. wars (the people who live where the wars are fought) never cross his mind at all. And why should they?

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