

## ***The Occupation, Year Two***

### **"Mission Accomplished"**

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The Independent  
May 9, 2005

Two years after "Mission Accomplished", whatever moral stature the United States could claim at the end of its invasion of Iraq has long ago been squandered in the torture and abuse and deaths at Abu Ghraib. That the symbol of Saddam Hussein's brutality should have been turned by his own enemies into the symbol of their own brutality is a singularly ironic epitaph for the whole Iraq adventure. We have all been contaminated by the cruelty of the interrogators and the guards and prison commanders.

But this is not only about Abu Ghraib. There are clear and proven connections now between the abuses at Abu Ghraib and the cruelty at the Americans' Bagram prison in Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay. Curiously, General Janis Karpinski, the only senior US officer facing charges over Abu Ghraib, admitted to me a year earlier when I visited the prison that she had been at Guantanamo Bay, but that at Abu Ghraib she was not permitted to attend interrogations - which seems very odd.

A vast quantity of evidence has now been built up on the system which the Americans have created for mistreating and torturing prisoners. I have interviewed a Palestinian who gave me compelling evidence of anal rape with wooden poles at Bagram - by Americans, not by Afghans.

Many of the stories now coming out of Guantanamo - the sexual humiliation of Muslim prisoners, their shackling to seats in which they defecate and urinate, the use of pornography to make Muslim prisoners feel impure, the female interrogators who wear little clothing (or, in one case, pretended to smear menstrual blood on a prisoner's face) - are increasingly proved true. Iraqis whom I have questioned at great length over many hours, speak with candour of terrifying beatings from military and civilian interrogators, not just in Abu Ghraib but in US bases elsewhere in Iraq.

At the American camp outside Fallujah, prisoners are beaten with full plastic water bottles which break, cutting the skin. At Abu Ghraib, prison dogs have been used to frighten and to bite prisoners.

How did this culture of filth start in America's "war on terror"? The institutionalised injustice which we have witnessed across the world, the vile American "renditions" in which prisoners are freighted to countries where they can be roasted, electrified or, in Uzbekistan, cooked alive in fat? As Bob Herbert wrote in The New York Times, what seemed mind-boggling when the first pictures emerged from Abu Ghraib is now routine, typical of the abuse that has "permeated the Bush administration's operations".

Amnesty, in a chilling 200-page document in October, traced the permeation of Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's memos into the prisoner interrogation system and the weasel-worded authorisation of torture. In August 2002, for example, only a few months

after Bush spoke under the "Mission Accomplished" banner, a Pentagon report stated that "in order to respect the President's inherent constitutional authority to manage a military campaign, [the US law prohibiting torture] must be construed as inapplicable to interrogations undertaken pursuant to his Commander-in-Chief authority." What does that mean other than permission from Bush to torture?

A 2004 Pentagon report uses words designed to allow interrogators to use cruelty without fear of court actions: "Even if the defendant knows that severe pain will result from his actions, if causing such harm is not his objective, he lacks the requisite specific intent [to be guilty of torture] even though the defendant did not act in good faith."

The man who directly institutionalised cruel sessions of interrogation in Abu Ghraib was Major-General Geoffrey Miller, the Guantanamo commander who flew to Abu Ghraib to "Gitmo-ize the confinement operation" there. There followed the increased use of painful shackling and the frequent forcible stripping of prisoners. Maj-Gen Miller's report following his visit in 2003 spoke of the need for a detention guard force at Abu Ghraib that "sets the conditions for the successful interrogation and exploitation of the internees/detainees". According to Gen Karpinski, Maj-Gen Miller said the prisoners "are like dogs, and if you allow them to believe they're more than a dog, then you've lost control of them".

The trail of prisons that now lies across Iraq is a shameful symbol not only of our cruelty but of our failure to create the circumstances in which a new Iraq might take shape. You may hold elections and create a government, but when this military sickness is allowed to spread, the whole purpose of democracy is overturned. The "new" Iraq will learn from these interrogation centres how they should treat prisoners and, inevitably, the "new" Iraqis will take over Abu Ghraib and return it to the status it had under Saddam and the whole purpose of the invasion (or at least the official version) will be lost.

With an insurgency growing ever more vicious and uncontrollable, the emptiness of Mr Bush's silly boast is plain. The real mission, it seems, was to institutionalise the cruelty of Western armies, staining us forever with the depravity of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo and Bagram - not to mention the secret prisons which even the Red Cross cannot visit and wherein who knows what vileness is conducted. What, I wonder, is our next "mission"?