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What the video of British troops beating Iraqi youth tell us

Yet more “bad apples”?

Anarcho

February 23, 2006

Faced with video evidence of brutality of British troops in Iraq, Blair indulged the reflex response we have come to expect. These are merely a few bad apples in an otherwise pure and untarnished barrel, he opined. The real question is how long is this nonsense going to remain unchallenged by the media? Given how this response is trotted out after every expose of troop brutality, it really is an insult to the intelligence.

The footage clearly shows the army beating young Iraqis in a way which clearly shows that they considered themselves as doing nothing wrong and simply going about their duty as they landed 41 blows in just one minute of tape. They ignored the screams of their victims, acting in full sight of both other soldiers and their officers. The only conclusion that can be reached is that this was considered an everyday occurrence.

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This is confirmed by looking at the video. It was taken by a British corporal, who begins his commentary (“Oh, yes! Oh, yes! You’re gonna get it. Yes!”) before the beatings start. Clearly he knew what was coming. This suggests one of two options. The first, more unlikely, one is that this was planned and the person filming was waiting for it to happen. The second is that such beatings are so routine that the video-taper knew from experience what to expect and obviously thought it was a hoot. Even worse, the film was used as entertainment. It was shown on a military base in Europe before someone came forward.

As such, it is hard to believe that the military hierarchy is ignorant of these kinds of events particularly given the history of previous British counter-insurgency campaigns in such places as Ireland, Malaya and Kenya. These show that the use of torture and ill-treatment was sanctioned at the highest levels. There is no reason to believe that anything has changed.

Blair maintains that this incident, like the ones before it, is unrepresentative. Ultimately, this excuse is simply an invitation to commit further atrocities as it is based on the belief that everything is basically alright and, ultimately, nothing needs to be changed. In only one sense, perhaps, he is right – this is the first one to have been video taped by British troops. According to Dr Jasem al-Aqrab, head of organisation for the Iraqi Islamic party in Basra, the *“truth is that ever since the fall of Saddam Hussein’s tyrannical regime, abuses and atrocities committed against Iraqi civilians have been a regular, at times daily, occurrence throughout the country, including in Basra. These have been committed by American, British and Iraqi official forces.”* (*“The Basra video should lay to rest a scurrilous lie,”* **The Guardian**, 12/2/2006)

Given that there are 15,000 Iraqis in custody any one time, you can only imagine the tens of thousands who have been beaten by foreign troops during the past years of occupation. Combine this with home invasions and repressions of demonstrations and we get a taste of why Blair’s comments are as unlikely to be true as

Bush's when faced with the evidence of US torture. The fact is that imperialism requires brutality. Its bloody history shows this and the current occupation of Iraq is no exception. However, brutality weakens imperialism in the long run as it deepens resentment and widens resistance. The cycle of repression and resistance continues until the imperialist power is finally ejected.

So it would be nice if the politicians and generals stopped throwing their arms up in the air in mock horror every time there is yet another revelation of soldiers ill-treating civilians. They know better but for obvious reasons they will not dispel the illusion that "our" troops are not dehumanised by the army regime. That brutality is required by and ingrained in the military seems an obvious conclusion, particularly as the last case of video-taped "bad apples" before this abusing of Iraqi civilians was one of soldiers abusing each one in degrading initiation ceremonies. It does not take much to draw a connection between the two. So rather than a few rotten apples in an otherwise good barrel, it is the whole barrel which is rotten.

In unrelated news, the CIA's top counter-terrorism official was fired by the Bush Junta recently. The reason? He opposed detaining Al-Qaeda suspects in secret prisons abroad, sending them to other countries for interrogation and using torture. Obviously just one bad apple in an otherwise wholesome barrel.

As can be seen from Bush and Cheney's deep felt opposition to torture which included the latter writing to every congress person and senator reminding them that the US had to use torture and the former announcing that he would ignore the anti-torture legislation passed by fellow republican Senator McCain. They promoted Alberto Gonzales, a White House lawyer who advised them that the US Constitution, the Geneva Conventions, American anti-torture and ratified international treaties against torture did not apply to them. He was made US Attorney General and the head of the Department of Justice, a clear sign that not only is satire dead but also of the Bush Junta's position on the abuse of prisoners.

The consequences are obvious. Given the nod for abuse and torture that the highest levels of the Bush Junta have repeatedly given, it becomes obvious for anyone working in this system (from a National Guardsman working in a detention facility like Abu Ghraib upwards) that justifying torture, practicing torture or (at best) ignoring others doing so is a good career move.

It is also clear that it is only the stupidity of filming torture will get you punished — assuming you are the person just following the orders rather than those who issued them. We can undoubtedly expect the same kind of justice when the British troops are tried. Sadly, the chances of the more important war criminals appearing alongside them in the court are extremely