

# Torturers' Puppetmasters

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## The President and His Vice: Torturers' Puppetmasters

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The President and His Vice: Torturers' Puppetmasters  
By Marjorie Cohn

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"It was clear to me that there was a visible audit trail from the Vice President's office through the Secretary of Defense down to the commanders in the field," Wilkerson, a former colonel, said on National Public Radio's "Morning Edition." The interrogation techniques sanctioned by Cheney "were not in accordance with the spirit of the Geneva Conventions and the law of war," Wilkerson declared.

Not coincidentally, Cheney has been lobbying Congress to prevent it from outlawing torture (which is already against the law, by the way). After Republican Senator John McCain secured 90 votes in the Senate to codify the prohibition against cruel, unusual, or degrading treatment or punishment, Cheney began to sweat. With CIA Director Porter Goss in tow, Cheney paid a visit to McCain and tried to convince the senator to allow an exemption for the CIA. McCain refused to legalize the CIA's ongoing illegal torture of prisoners.

Last week, Dana Priest wrote in the Washington Post that the CIA has been surreptitiously interrogating prisoners in a Soviet-era compound in Eastern Europe. Human Rights Watch identified Romania and Poland, two supporters of Bush's wars on Iraq and Afghanistan, as locations for these secret prisons.

Only Bush and a few of his top officials, undoubtedly including Cheney, have known about the existence and situs of these "black sites," as they are called in classified White House, CIA, Justice Department and Congressional documents, according to Priest.

The secret prisons were established pursuant to a presidential "finding" signed by Bush six days after the September 11 attacks. That finding gives the CIA permission to kill, capture and detain members of al Qaeda anywhere in the world. Assassination, or summary execution, violates US and international law.

More than 100 suspected terrorists have been taken to these "black sites." Many are held underground and subjected to torture out of view of the International Committee of the Red Cross.

CIA interrogators use "Enhanced Interrogation Techniques," which violate US law. They include "waterboarding" (mock drowning) and mock suffocation. Another enhancement is a "stress position," in which a prisoner is suspended from the ceiling or wall by his wrists, which are handcuffed behind his back. Iraqi Manadel Jamadi was subjected to this treatment before he died in CIA custody at Abu Ghraib in November 2003. Tony Diaz, an MP who witnessed his torture, said that blood gushed from Jamadi's mouth like "a faucet had turned on" after he was lowered to the ground.

Several current and former intelligence officials are nervous about these "black sites," which were set up in a knee-jerk response to 9/11, Priest reported.

About the same time the "black sites" were established, Cheney undertook a campaign to introduce torture as a standard interrogation technique, according to the Washington Monthly. One of his test cases was Ibn al-Shaykh al-Libi, an al-Qaeda prisoner captured shortly after 9/11. An ex-FBI official reported that "they duct-taped his mouth, cinched him up and sent him to Cairo" for some torturous Egyptian interrogations, in violation of US law prohibiting extraordinary renditions.

A newly declassified memo reveals that al-Libi provided us with false information that suggested Iraq had trained al-Qaeda to use weapons of mass destruction. Even though US intelligence thought the information was false as early as 2002 because it was obtained under torture, al-Libi's information provided the centerpiece of Colin Powell's now

thoroughly discredited February 2003 claim before the United Nations that Iraq had developed WMD programs.

Dick Cheney not only ordered the torture; he was willing to use false information obtained through torture to support Bush's pre-determined decision to make war on Iraq.

Now that Cheney has been fingered as complicit in the torture, it is just a matter of time before the official torture dots connect to the President himself. In December 2004, the American Civil Liberties Union released an internal FBI email that the ALCU received pursuant to the Freedom of Information Act. The email, dated May 22, 2004, describes an Executive Order that authorized sleep deprivation, placing hoods over prisoners' heads, the use of loud music for sensory overload, stripping detainees naked, the use of "stress positions," and the use of dogs. The White House, Pentagon and FBI officials denied that Bush had issued such an Executive Order, saying that it was really a Defense Department directive instead.

It is undisputed that Bush determined in a February 7, 2002, order that he had the authority to suspend the Geneva Conventions, a position never before taken by an American president and a clear violation of US law.

Bush wrote in that order, "As a matter of policy, the United States Armed Forces shall continue to treat detainees humanely and, to the extent appropriate and consistent with military necessity, in a manner consistent with the principles of Geneva." (Emphasis added.)

In essence, Bush declared, incorrectly, that as commander in chief, he had the power to override the law with his policy. Where did he get that idea? From a January 25, 2002, memo sent by Alberto Gonzales to the President, which described the Geneva Conventions as "obsolete" and "quaint." That memo was inspired by David Addington, just named by Cheney to replace the indicted I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby as the Vice President's chief of staff.

Addington was assistant general counsel to the CIA when Reagan was funding the death squads in El Salvador and the illegal Nicaraguan contras. Cheney's new chief of staff helped draft the infamous August 2002 memo that illegally narrowed the definition of torture, and justified torture in some cases. Now, Addington is trying to prevent the Pentagon from adopting the language of Geneva in its revised rules for handling prisoners. The circle of torture remains unbroken.

Libby is charged with obstruction of justice and lying to the FBI about the outing of a CIA agent. As in the Watergate scandal, a White House official is being prosecuted for the cover-up. There is plenty of evidence that officials in the Bush administration have been trying to cover up their torture since the inception of Bush's "war on terror."

The earliest example of the official cover-up was when John Walker Lindh, captured in Afghanistan shortly after September 11, 2001, was given a plea bargain that required him to keep mum about the mistreatment he suffered while in US custody. Col. Janis Karpinski told me in an August 3, 2005, interview (Abu Ghraib General Lambastes Bush Administration) that after she first learned of the abuse scandal at Abu Ghraib, Gen. Ricardo Sanchez took systematic steps to hush it up. Soldiers reported to Human Rights Watch that US soldiers, called "Murderous Maniacs," broke prisoners' bones every other week at FOB Mercury; then, "those responsible would state that the detainee was injured during the process of capture and the physician assistant would sign off on this."

Most recently, in an effort to smooth over the torture of the hunger strikers by US officials at Guantánamo prison, Donald Rumsfeld said, "There are a number of people who go on a diet where they don't eat for a period and then go off of it at some point. And then they rotate and other people do that." Rumsfeld refuses to allow UN human rights investigators to meet with the prisoners there.

What is Rumsfeld trying to hide at Guantánamo? About 200 prisoners, many of whom have been there nearly four years without criminal charges, have been on a hunger strike for several weeks. Several of them are being force-fed through large tubes inserted into their noses and down into their stomachs, with no sedatives or anesthesia. One prisoner explained to his lawyer, "Now, after four years in captivity, life and death are the same."

The Washington Post reported today that Cheney has waged an intense, largely unpublicized campaign over the past year to prevent Congress, the Pentagon and the State Department from restricting interrogations of terrorist suspects.

Dick Cheney is right in the center of the Bush administration's government of dirty tricks. By replacing Libby with Addington, Cheney has signaled his determination to continue Bush's torturous policies. In a recent editorial, the Washington Post called Dick Cheney "Vice President for Torture." The President and his Vice continue to pull the torturers' puppet strings. Will Bush be deemed complicit in the torture? Or will his deputies cover up for him the way Ronald Reagan's men insulated him from liability in the Iran-Contra scandal?

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