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Red Cross: Torture Committed At CIA Sites

Secret Report Accuses U.S. Of "Cruel, Inhuman And Degrading" Treatment Of High-Profile Detainees

March 16, 2009

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Waterboarding was one technique used by CIA interrogators that the report's authors say constituted torture. (CBS)

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(CBS) The United States engaged in acts of torture and "cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment" upon prisoners held at secret detention sites operated by or in conjunction with the CIA, according to details from a secret report by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Such acts constitute violations of the **United Nations' Convention Against Torture** and the **Geneva Conventions**, the Red Cross said.

The ICRC is the appointed legal guardian of the Geneva Conventions and oversees the treatment of prisoners of war.

The secret report was based on interviews conducted by representatives of the Red Cross with detainees at Guantanamo Bay, the U.S. military prison in Cuba where prisoners captured during the Bush administration's war on terror have been held, many for years without charge.

Prior to their arrival at Guantanamo, many have been shuttled between detention facilities in other countries, including "black sites" operated by the Central Intelligence Agency. Some sites are in countries, like Thailand, in which the use of torture has been documented by human rights organizations.

The report followed negotiations with the Bush administration over granting access to 14 "high-value" detainees, which the U.S. had previously deemed off-limits to the Red Cross, to monitor their

treatment.

ICRC representatives conducted interviews with the prisoners at Guantanamo in the fall of 2006 to determine the circumstances of their detention and treatment, which for the detainees ranged from a period of 16 months to nearly four-and-a-half years. The interviews were conducted in private, with assurances that the details would not be made public. A few prisoners asked that their identities not be revealed.

The 43-page secret report dated February 2007 was provided to the CIA and passed on to higher U.S. officials, including President Bush, according to The Washington Post.

A copy of the report was obtained by journalist Mark Danner and excerpted in his article published Monday in the New York Review of Books, "**U.S. Torture: Voices From The Black Sites.**"

It discusses elements of the CIA rendition and detention program, in which prisoners were transported - shackled and blindfolded - to secret "black sites" where they faced interrogation using what President Bush, in a **September 6, 2006 speech** publicly revealing the program, termed "an alternative set of procedures."

These techniques, the Red Cross states, included suffocation by water, beatings, confinement in a box, sleep deprivation, forced nudity, exposure to cold temperatures or cold water, starvation and prolonged stress positions.

According to the report's authors, "in many cases, the ill-treatment to which they were subjected while held in the CIA program ... constituted torture."

"In addition, many other elements of the ill-treatment, either singly or in combination, constituted cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment."

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Claire Algar, executive director of the human rights group [Reprive UK](#), which has represented terror suspects, told **CBS News** that the Red Cross report is believable: "The ICRC is an extremely reputable source, and this accords very much with what Reprive's clients have said."

The report notes that many of the prisoners interviewed related common stories, even though they had no contact with one another.

Among the high-profile prisoners interviewed was Abu Zubaydah, whom President Bush described as "a senior terrorist leader and a trusted associate of Osama bin Laden." He was captured after being wounded in a 2002 firefight in Faisalabad, Pakistan. After being treated in a Lahore military hospital, Zubaydah was reportedly moved to Thailand and then possibly Afghanistan.

Zubaydah said that initially his interrogations in Thailand consisted of being shackled naked to a bed and having solid foods withheld for two or three weeks. He was deprived of sleep and subjected to cold temperatures.

The report says that interrogators from the CIA alternated harsh and lenient treatment in order to obtain information. In summer of 2002 top administration lawyers gave the CIA permission to use "more aggressive" techniques.

Zubaydah recounted instances of being beaten, being placed in a coffin-like box with no light and little air, and being waterboarded:

"I collapsed and lost consciousness on several occasions. Eventually the torture was stopped by the intervention of the doctor.

"I was told during this period that I was one of the first to receive these interrogation techniques, so no rules applied."

"Forced standing" was another technique that was recounted by prisoners in their interviews.

Walid Bin Attash, a Yemeni captured in Karachi in April 2003, told the ICRC that upon his arrival at the detention facility in Afghanistan

"I was stripped naked. I remained naked for the next two weeks. I was put in a cell measuring approximately [3 1/2 by 6 1/2 feet]. I was kept in a standing position, feet flat on the floor, but with my arms above my head and fixed with handcuffs and a chain to a metal bar running across the width of the cell. The cell was dark with no light, artificial or natural.

"During the first two weeks I did not receive any food. I was only given Ensure and water to drink. A guard would come and hold the bottle for me while I drank.... The toilet consisted of a bucket in the cell.... I was not allowed to clean myself after using the bucket. Loud music was playing twenty-four hours each day throughout the three weeks I was there."

The forced standing position was particularly grueling for Bin Attash, as he had only one leg.

"After some time being held in this position my stump began to hurt so I removed my artificial leg to relieve the pain. Of course my good leg then began to ache and soon started to give way so that I was left hanging with all my weight on my wrists. I shouted for help but at first nobody came. Finally, after about one hour a guard came and my artificial leg was given back to me and I was again placed in the standing position with my hands above my head. After that the interrogators sometimes deliberately removed my artificial leg in order to add extra stress to the position."

Khaled Shaik Mohammed, one of the prisoners interviewed, told the Red Cross that after being forced into stress positions, beaten, immersed in cold water and given enemas, he was informed by his interrogators that

"[T]hey had received the 'green light from Washington' to give him 'a hard time.' They never used the word 'torture' and never referred to 'physical pressure,' only to 'a hard time.' I was never threatened with death, in fact I was told that they would not allow me to die, but that I would be brought to the 'verge of death and back again.'"

Those treatments entailed beating, cold water immersions and waterboarding. He told the ICRC that he gave "a lot of false information in order to satisfy what I believed the interrogators wished to hear in order to make the ill-treatment stop. ... I'm sure that the false information I was forced to invent ... wasted a lot of their time and led to several false red-alerts being placed in the U.S."

"This is clear evidence of torture, torture ordered by the most senior officials of government," Kenneth Roth, executive director of Human Rights Watch, told **CBS News**.

"Even if you could say that some of these people might have an interest in exaggerating the mistreatment that they endured, when you hear the same thing over and over and over again, you begin to realize that this is exactly what happened, and they're describing quite accurately what occurred to them."

Roth said that a thorough investigation into what happened - both at these sites and in the highest offices of government - is required. "Some future presidents faced with a future security threat may resort to this kind of torture again, unless some kind of respected commission definitively repudiates it, and ideally the authors of this torture are brought to justice."

The report follows [an earlier ICRC report dated February 2004](#) about the treatment of prisoners by U.S. coalition forces in Iraq. It alleged "serious violations of International Humanitarian Law," including brutality, physical or psychological coercion during interrogation, prolonged solitary confinement, and excessive and disproportionate use of force "resulting in death or injury."

By **CBSNews.com producer David Morgan**

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Why is it that when someone else does the torture we get our shorts in a bunch, but when we torture someone it's ok?

No one ever gets punished anyway, so whats the point of beating a dead horse

Posted by **philstoney** at 10:36 AM : Mar 16, 2009

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What do the Spanish Inquisition, the Imperial Japanese Army, the Wehrmacht, and the US Army and CIA have in common?

All have used and justify the same interrogation methods.

Yea American! Beacon of Civilization!

Posted by **nancy_naive** at 10:34 AM : Mar 16, 2009

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Doesn't the torture of terrorist make us what we loath?

Posted by **aeasus** at 10:32 AM : Mar 16, 2009

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I hope the Hague, the EU and the UN request the extradition of the Bush Administration leaders who have conspired and defended torture, renditions, kidnappings and false imprisonment of SUSPECTS (civilians) who were never tried...

for TRIALS on War Crimes and mistreatment of POWs and the deaths of others in CIA detention under these policies...

Posted by **mjlewis6** at 10:31 AM : Mar 16, 2009

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I understand eye-for-eye! I was drafted during Vietnam. I volunteered at the VA for 4 years while in grad school.

There IS a problem - as an American, as a believer in the Constitution, as a moral person, and as a Christian - actions such as this make me realize just how absymally evil the US became under Bush - how greedy and "vulgar with power" the Republicans are - and why the U.S. is so despised in so much of the world.

As for the comment about beheading - please, don't insult the intelligence of those of us who witnessed far, far worse than that in Vietnam - and perpetrated by our own troops. Eye-for-eye makes all the Republicans blind!

Posted by **doctajim** at 10:28 AM : Mar 16, 2009

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Shame on US.

So much for that 'high road', wonder what this will result in for our own military when

captured?
Thanks, Bu\$hCo.

Posted by **inventagod** at 10:21 AM : Mar 16, 2009
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So you want to be like them?

thats the point. civilized people dont torture others. Grow up.

Posted by **legacyabq** at 10:18 AM : Mar 16, 2009
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and the problem is? perhaps beheading with a dull butchers knife would have been better in the end as they have often done to others.

Posted by **wtcmedic911** at 10:08 AM : Mar 16, 2009
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