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**The Hush-Hush Story: Why They Tortured
Left Margin**

By Carl Bloice

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board

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It's like a can of worms from which a few are slithering out. Most of the major media have avoided even approaching it. But if it is as is being suggested the implications are enormous, touching not only on the real reason prisoners were tortured but, as well, into the real origin of the war in Iraq.

The US Senate Armed Services Committee report, issued April 21, on the interrogation techniques employed against detainees following the September 11 terrorist attack, wrote Pepe Escobar in the *Asia Times*, "reads like deja vu all over again: the US establishment under Bush was a replay of the Spanish Inquisition. And it all started even before a single 'high-profile al-Qaeda detainee' was captured. What Bush, vice president Dick Cheney, defense secretary Donald Rumsfeld and assorted little inquisitors wanted was above all to prove the non-existent link between Saddam Hussein's Iraq and al-Qaeda, the better to justify a pre-emptive, illegal war planned by the now-defunct Project for the New American Century (PNAC) in the late 1990s. The torture memos were just a cog in the imperial machine."

New York Times columnist Paul Krugman mentioned it in his column April 24, writing, "For the fact is that officials in the Bush administration instituted torture as a policy, misled the nation into a war they wanted to fight and, probably, tortured people in the attempt to extract 'confessions' that would justify that war. And during the march to war, most of the political and media establishment looked the other way." Krugman was more explicit in his blog, titled "Grand Unified Scandal" appearing the previous day, after the Senate report came out. "Let's say this slowly: the Bush administration wanted to use 9/11 as a pretext to invade Iraq, even though Iraq had nothing to do

with 9/11. So it tortured people to make them confess to the nonexistent link," he wrote. "There's a word for this: it's evil."

The impetus for the comment by Krugman and Escobar was a story carried April 21 in the *McClatchy Newspapers* by Jonathan S. Landay. The story has made the rounds on the internet and in some of the foreign press but as of this writing has been ignored or obscured by most of the major U.S. media.

"The Bush administration applied relentless pressure on interrogators to use harsh methods on detainees in part to find evidence of cooperation between al Qaida and the late Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein's regime, according to a former senior U.S. intelligence official and a former Army psychiatrist," wrote Landay. "Such information would've provided a foundation for one of former President George W. Bush's main arguments for invading Iraq in 2003. In fact, no evidence has ever been found of operational ties between Osama bin Laden's terrorist network and Saddam's regime.

"The use of abusive interrogation - widely considered torture - as part of Bush's quest for a rationale to invade Iraq came to light as the Senate issued a major report tracing the origin of the abuses and President Barack Obama opened the door to prosecuting former U.S. officials for approving them."

Landay went on to quote "A former senior U.S. intelligence official familiar with the interrogation issue" saying former Vice President Dick Cheney and former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld 'demanded that the interrogators find evidence of al Qaida-Iraq collaboration.'

"There were two reasons why these interrogations were so persistent, and why extreme methods were used," Landay was told. "The main one is that everyone was worried about some kind of follow-up attack (after 9/11). But for most of 2002 and into 2003, Cheney and Rumsfeld, especially, were also demanding proof of the links between al Qaida and Iraq that (former Iraqi exile leader Ahmed) Chalabi and others had told them were there."

"There was constant pressure on the intelligence agencies and the interrogators to do whatever it took to get that information out of the detainees, especially the few high-value ones we had, and when people kept coming up empty, they were told by Cheney's and Rumsfeld's people to push harder," the informant continued. "Cheney's and Rumsfeld's people were told repeatedly, by CIA ... and by others, that there wasn't any reliable intelligence that pointed to operational ties between bin Laden and Saddam, and that no such ties were likely because the two were fundamentally enemies, not allies."

Senior administration officials, however, "blew that off and kept insisting that we'd overlooked something, that the interrogators weren't pushing hard enough, that there had to be something more we could do to get that information," Landay was told.

The Senate report itself quoted a former U.S. Army psychiatrist, Maj. Charles Burney, who told Army investigators three years ago that interrogators at the Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, detention facility were under "pressure" to produce evidence of ties between al Qaida and Iraq.

"While we were there a large part of the time we were focused on trying to establish a link between al Qaida and Iraq and we were not successful in establishing a link between al Qaida and Iraq," Burney told staff of the Army Inspector General. "The more frustrated people got in not being able to establish that link ... there was more and more pressure to resort to measures that might produce more immediate results."

Another newspaper that carried the story of the Senate report that included the Iraq connection was the *Detroit News*. Reporter Gordon Trowbridge wrote that "Administration officials repeatedly tried to link Iraq and al-Qaida in public statements as a potential justification for the war, but intelligence reviews have discredited the notion of significant links between the two. The accusation that senior officials chose to pursue interrogation tactics in pursuit of such information is likely to further anger opponents of the Iraq invasion and of harsh interrogation techniques such as waterboarding, sleep deprivation, putting prisoners in stress positions for long periods of time or exposing them to extreme heat and cold or loud noises and music."

Trowbridge's report indicates that one of Cheney and Rumsfeld's "people" was none other than the latter's number two Paul Wolfowitz, a long time vociferous advocate of an attack in Iraq. He is said to have asked for regular updates on the interrogations.

"I think it's obvious that the administration was scrambling then to try to find a connection, a link (between al Qaida and Iraq)," said Senate Armed Services Committee, chair by Sen. Carl Levin, (D-Mi). "They made out links where they didn't exist."

"So now we know: Saddam made them do it," wrote Charley James, "The Progressive Curmudgeon, in the very informative and lively *L.A. Progressive* [<http://tinyurl.com/dl96bn>]. "The Levin report into Pentagon torture ... tore down the last false flag flying on the devil ship SS Torture, revealing that waterboarding and all the rest of the barbaric acts performed in our name on prisoners resulted from Cheney's frustration at not getting what he wanted: Someone to pin 9/11 on Saddam and 'fess up about how bin Laden was sleeping with The Tyrant of Baghdad."

"Reasonable people ought to be able to reach consensus on a few key points: Harsh interrogation methods should be used only as a last resort," says Clifford D. May, president of the rightwing Foundation for the Defense of Democracies (founded two days after September 11, and chair of the Policy hawkish Committee of the Committee on the Present Danger (CPD). "They should never be used for revenge, punishment or to force confessions." However, as James observes, it beginning to look like forcing a confession is exactly what the neo-conservative cabal in the White House and the Pentagon was up to.

Writing in *The Guardian* (UK) April 24, Matthew Duss drew attention to Rand Beers – a former NSC counterterrorism adviser who resigned over the war "which he correctly predicted would be disastrous for American security, and who was recently nominated for an under-secretary position at the Department of Homeland Security, concerning accused Al Qaeda operative Ibn al Sheikh Al-Libi who after being captured by the US in Afghanistan in late 2001, under torture – "evidence" of a tie between Al Qaeda and Iraq. As Beers recounted last year, 'Al-Libi's testimony was used by the Bush

administration to substantiate its allegations that Iraq was prepared to provide al-Qaida with weapons of mass destruction.' However, Beers continued, 'in January 2004, al-Libi recanted his confession. He said that he had invented the information because he was afraid of being further abused by his interrogators. ... The administration's best case for the value of enhanced interrogation techniques, then, turned out to have been fundamentally flawed'."

"We now know that torture is inextricably tied to the Iraq war. Far from defusing "ticking time bombs", torture was employed by the Bush administration in order to generate information that would support their planned invasion of Iraq."

Notice the word "planned" here. The effort to extract evidence of a tie between September 11 and the government of Saddam Hussein began before the invasion was launched. It is obvious now that the attack was in the making before the attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

"But the torture of al Libi worked to sell the war in Iraq, providing the "evidence" that Secretary of State Colin Powell used when he spoke before the United Nations Security Council in February 2003," Steve Weissman wrote on [truthout](#) last Saturday. "I can trace the story of a senior terrorist operative telling how Iraq provided training in these [chemical and biological] weapons to al-Qaeda," Powell asserted. "Fortunately, this operative is now detained, and he has told his story."

It now appears that then U.S. National Security Advisor and later Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was the first official to give the go ahead for employing "enhanced interrogation techniques." Why her? And, why the hurry? She is declining comment now but maybe she could explain the strange statement she made at a press briefing in May 2002. "I don't think anybody could have predicted ... that they would try to use an airplane as a missile, a hijacked airplane as a missile," Rice said at a press briefing in May 2002. Actually the Administration was warned that something was afoot and that it probably would involve airplanes. Was the surprise that it happened or the way that it happened and was the idea to blame whatever happened on Saddam Husain?

This week, former Ambassador Joe Wilson wrote in his blog, *Daily Beast*:

"Cheney's request for the declassification of material is a welcome development, but it should not be limited to his narrow request. Our country's understanding of what was done in our name by the Bush administration depends on the release, not just of the documents Cheney has designated, but of all documents related to the efforts of the Bush administration and Cheney himself to defend the indefensible-the decision to invade Iraq despite the knowledge at the time that Iraq did not have a nuclear program, had no ties to al Qaeda, and posed no existential threat to the United States or to its friends and allies in the region.

"The disinformation campaign to manipulate public opinion in favor of the invasion, the torture program, and the illegal exposure of a clandestine CIA agent-my wife, Valerie Plame Wilson - were linked events. In their desperate effort to gather material to whip up public support, Cheney and others resorted to torture, well known in the intelligence craft to elicit inherently unreliable information. Cheney & Co. then pressured the CIA to put its stamp of approval on a series of falsehoods-26 of which were inserted into

Secretary of State Colin Powell's speech before the United Nations Security Council. At the same time, Cheney was furiously attempting to suppress the true information that Saddam Hussein was not seeking yellowcake uranium in Niger. After I published the facts in an article in *The New York Times* in July 2002, Cheney tried to punish me and discredit the truth by directing the outing of a CIA operative who happened to be my wife.

The suggestion that Bush Administration used torture in an effort to get a prisoner to back up their previously made claim that Iraq was linked to despicable 911 terrorist attacks is reason enough to insist that there be a special commission to look into the matter. I suspect that much of the resistance to doing so flows from concern that question might arise about other things involved in the run-up to the war. Like, why were the plotters were so desperate to link 911 to Iraq? Could it be that some sort of attack on U.S. soil was anticipated and whatever happened, the finger would be pointed at Bagdad? A can of worms indeed.


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