

Torture under Obama

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By: **Nat Henthoff, First Amendment**, The Jamestown Sun

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"Torture's Loopholes" (New York Times, Jan. 20) is by Matthew Alexander, a 14-year veteran of the U.S. Air Force and Air Force Reserves. In 2006, he led the U.S. interrogation team that tracked and found Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, the insatiable killer who commanded al-Qaida in Iraq and was then terminated by coalition forces. Alexander went on to write a book that was not endorsed by Dick Cheney: "How to Break a Terrorist: The U.S. Interrogators Who Used Brains, Not Brutality, to Take Down the Deadliest Man in Iraq."

This is what Alexander, who describes himself as "an investigator turned interrogator," has to say about Obama allegedly banning torture — and the accompanying decision last August by Attorney General Eric Holder to remove responsibility for interrogating detainees to a new FBI-directed High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group that will constrain itself to use only "noncoercive" methods or those approved by the Army Field Manual.

Unequivocally, Alexander states: "If I were to return to one of the war zones today...I would still be allowed to abuse prisoners." How come? In August, Holder's task force on interrogation, commissioned by the president, "recommended no changes" to the Army Field Manual, thereby retaining the torture loopholes focused on now by the tracker of al-Zarqawi.

To begin, an appendix to the Manual allows a detainee (a.k.a. prisoner) to be kept in solitary confinement indefinitely. As Alexander point out, "extended solitary confinement is torture, as confirmed by many scientific studies." And the prestigious Manual allows suspects just four hours sleep in 24 hours. "As if this wasn't enough," Alexander continues, a loophole permits interrogators, Mr. President, 'to give a detainee four hours of sleep — and then conduct a 20-hour interrogation, after which they can 'reset' the clock and begin another 20-hour interrogation followed by four hours of sleep."

You certainly keep physically fit, Mr. President, but I wonder what your definition of torture is if you allowed yourself, as part of a clinical test, to be interrogated for 40 hours straight?

Until this change in the Army Field Manual, Alexander points out, an interrogator going beyond 20 straight hours of interrogation (as if that weren't inhumane enough) was referred to as "monsterring" in that line of work.

Well, Barack Obama did campaign as a much-needed agent of change.

Alexander, who is also a historian of military interrogation, notes that "the United States has a rich history of military ethics dating back to General George Washington during the Revolutionary War. According to General Washington, 'Should any American soldier be so base and infamous as to injure any prisoner ... by such conduct they bring shame, disgrace and ruin to themselves and their country.'"

What Washington meant by "such conduct" was the brutal, vicious ways the British army was interrogating their American prisoners. George Washington was The Army Field Manual during our Revolutionary War. But history isn't taught much in the schools anymore, or in the military.

With regard to the systemic torture policy of the Bush-Cheney administration and its effect on recruiters for terrorist forces, Alexander says ("The Daily Beast" on April 20, 2009, www.thedailybeast.com):

"I listened time and again (in Iraq) to captured foreign fighters cite the torture and abuse at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo as their main reason for coming to Iraq to fight. Consider that 90 percent of the suicide bombers in Iraq are these foreign fighters and you can easily conclude that we have lost hundreds, if not thousands, of American lives because of our policy of torture and abuse."

There were hundreds more photographs of American torture practices in Afghanistan as well as in Iraq that President Obama commanded in May must not be released despite a previous court order to the contrary. He said they would have a "chilling effect" on further investigations of abuse of detainees. Huh? But Obama, ever desiring to "look forward," is uninterested in such investigations. But he insisted that any future abuse of our prisoners is "unacceptable and will not be tolerated."

(www.cnn.com/2009/POLITICS/05/12/prisoner.photos)

In reaction to this White House censorship, ACLU attorney Amrit Singh said in that same CNN story: "By withholding these photographs from public view, the Obama administration is making itself complicit in the Bush administration's torture policies."

I do not expect any Obama "transparency" (another broken pledge) uncovering what lawless abuses are, under his own administration's watch, taking place through the "loopholes" in the Army Field Manual, and elsewhere. This is not for us low-level citizens to know.

Meanwhile, where is Sen. Pat Leahy, D-Vt., chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee? He used to insist there be a bipartisan congressional investigation to determine who has been accountable for past official brutality that has not only aided the terrorists but has also greatly marred confidence in us around the world as a model of justice under law in a global battle for the survival — as Colin Powell said right after 9/11— of civilization.

And, along with investigations of past U.S. torture, where is Obama on torture now?

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