TORTURE? US?

Ruth Blakeley shows how some memoirs can be more revealing than others

George W Bush recently claimed the waterboarding of three suspects helped prevent attacks on Heathrow and Canary Wharf. He personally authorised the waterboarding of Khaled Sheikh Mohammed. He claimed waterboarding was 'highly effective', providing 'large amounts of information'. He also insisted 'Enhanced Interrogation Techniques' were not torture.

These claims are completely at odds with the conclusions of the CIA Inspector General's 2004 investigation into waterboarding, including of Khaled Sheikh Mohammed. The Inspector General knew 'Enhanced Interrogation Techniques' and waterboarding constitute torture: 'The Enhanced Interrogation Techniques are inconsistent with the public policy positions the US has taken regarding human rights'. He noted the US State Department calls other states on similar practices and describes them as torture.

The Inspector General concluded that waterboarding did not yield valuable intelligence pertaining to imminent security threats. He also noted that measuring the effectiveness of Enhanced Interrogation Techniques is 'not without some concern', since the CIA 'cannot determine with any certainty the totality of intelligence the detainee actually possesses', 'each detainee has different fears and tolerance of Enhanced Interrogation Techniques', and 'the application of the same Enhanced Interrogation

Techniques by different interrogators may have different results'. Many military interrogators have argued torture does not yield credible intelligence. Jean Jacques Massu, who led the 1960s French counterinsurgency campaign in Algeria and used torture widely, later declared it fails to secure useful intelligence. Instead it strengthens and legitimises enemies.

Furthermore, the Inspector General found that although the Department of Justice had issued rules about how frequently a detainee could be waterboarded, its use was far in excess of these. Improvised techniques were also deployed. These included threats with power drills and handguns, beatings, mock executions, and threats of sexual assault, rape and death to detainees' families. Human rights experts have persistently argued that when permission is granted for torture it always extends far beyond any stipulated limits.

British officials were quick to distance the UK from Bush's claims. Former head of MI5, Baroness Manningham-Buller, insisted she knew nothing of Khalid Sheikh Mohammed's waterboarding until after retiring in 2007. Kim Howells, former chairman of Britain's intelligence and security committee, insisted he did not believe British security services would have had anything to do with waterboarding, which he defined as torture. He did not comment on British use of 'Enhanced Interrogation Techniques'.

However the week before these statements

were made, *The Guardian* reported that it had seen current British military training materials that encouraged techniques similar to Enhanced Interrogation Techniques, such as threats, sleep and sensory deprivation, blindfolds, prolonged enforced nakedness, and physical examinations of the rectum and behind the foreskin. The measures were intended to humiliate and provoke fear, insecurity and disorientation. Their illegality was implied when the authors of the materials insisted they be used in secret, 'away from the media'.

The British Government outlawed the 'five techniques' – sleep deprivation, hooding, subjecting to noise, food and drink deprivation, and 'wall standing' stress positions – following their use against British IRA suspects in the 1970s. They were also deemed inhuman and degrading, and therefore illegal, by the European Court of Human Rights. Yet they have crept back in.

Given Britain's close relationship with the US, this should come as no surprise. Britain should be scrutinised for its complicity, particularly in light of evidence that torture and cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment have been institutionally condoned, including through the presence of MI5 agents when British citizens were interrogated and tortured in the US rendition programme. Bush is liable to prosecution for violations of the Convention Against Torture and the Geneva Conventions. Elements of the British security forces may also be.

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