

# Abu ghraib and insaniyat essay

Business, Strategy



Abu Ghraib and Insaniyat Article by: Arshin Adib-Moghaddam “ We have met the enemy, and he is us” Iraq is a different world than where we live in North America. Canadian values and culture of North America are vastly different from those of the Middle Eastern country that is the subject of an-article by Arshin Adib-Moghaddam titled Abu Gharib and Insaniyat. Following the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001 the differences between these two cultures seemed immense. The stories and images that were beamed into our houses by television and other media were unreal to our eyes. From our perspective we feel fortunate to live in a different place and wonder how the world got to a point where things can be so different in two places, which in the large scheme of things are relatively close. This article discusses these differences and the results that arise from each perspective based upon the American treatment of Prisoners at Abu-Ghraib.

Abu Ghraib is a prison in Baghdad, Iraq. The prison is run by the American military, and in 2001, following the terrorist attacks of Muslim terrorists Abu Ghriab became the site of vicious treatment of Iraqis who were humiliated and tortured by their American captors. The article by Arshin Adib-Moghaddam discusses the various issues around the mistreatment and torture of these captives by the Americans and the impact that behaviour has created in the Muslim world, he looks at the reasons for it and comes to the conclusion that the gap between bashariya and insaniyat is the cause.

Adib-Moghaddam defines these words as Ali Shariati had; Bashar “ is that particular being that contains physiological characteristics which are share by all humans, regardless of whether they are black, white, yellow, western, religious, or non religious” and Insan differs as it is “ a becoming while

Bashar is a being". He explains the evolution from being bashariya to insaniyat, how inherently everyone is a bashar and some are in the process of becoming insan, and some have attained insanyat. The reason for these terms in the context of torture is that the two cultures of the Americas and the Eastern countries like Iraq are in different stages of bashariya and insaniyat. In Abu-Ghraib the feelings of dislike for terrorist actions, and a wish for revenge caused the American captors to abuse their detainees and in doing so create a feeling throughout the Muslim world that the American non believers were bigoted and prejudiced toward all Muslims. The published treatments and acts of torture were felt to be inconsistent with the ideals that Americans preached to the world, and which were held up as a standard of behaviour that was expected of themselves and of others. The common definition of torture is the act of inflicting excruciating pain, as punishment or revenge, as a means of getting a confession or information, or for sheer cruelty. This is exactly what went on within the gates of Abu Ghraib.

Although authorities from the prison claim the torture was in order to gain information, the behaviour went well beyond that simple objective, and in the eyes of the world's media this distinction was apparent. In many cases the eyes of the world identified sheer cruelty as a motive. In the aftermath of the revelations of the American behaviour it was argued that when faced with the cultural and language barriers it was extremely difficult to get a definite confession, and harsher measures were warranted. Though such acts are prohibited by international law, and are considered unacceptable even when seemingly required by military necessity (Lee: 2007: 221).

The combination of cultural and language differences and the anger directed indiscriminately toward an entire group of people, most of whom were innocent of any ill will and certainly unaware of the cause of 9/11 were targeted out of nothing more than frustration and anger towards their people. The war on terrorism and the war against Iraq was a long time coming; however after the events of 9/11 it was a common American stereotype that there was something seriously wrong with all Arab peoples. They saw every Iraqi, Pakistani, Iranian or Saudi as a terrorist and a threat to their country. All were subject to a negative judgement without cause or trial. With the benefit of a passage of time we have learned that these feelings were misdirected and wrong.

It was as though certain people, those of a different race and nationally, were robbed of their human rights and cast in the role of criminals solely because of their culture and the acts of groups they likely did not know. In the calm aftermath and a chance to reflect on this behaviour some American officials admitted that Abu Ghraib was the functional equivalent of the 9/11 attack, only committed this time by the United States (Greenberg 2005: 98). Prior to 9/11 there had been various terrorist attacks on Americans around the world and on American soil. However the events of September 11 intensely changed the United States Government's approach towards terrorism. After September 11, the Bush Administration changed the previous American approach, which had primarily employed the combined tools of diplomatic cooperation, economic sanctions, and internationally coordinated law enforcement measures (Lee 2007: 137). Instead, the

President declared in the aftermath of September 11 that the United States was engaged in a war on terrorism.

In this war all terrorists who plotted against the United States and those who supported them were subject to American justice. This new and broader stance wasn't spontaneous but was considered and supported by the broad cross-section of Americans and became part of the formulation of United States national foreign policy. The result of this political decision and the substantive policies that grew from it were illustrated to the world at Abu-Ghraib. The world did not like it. The world was appalled at the clear departure from the righteous of Americans, they were shocked by the criminal behaviours caught on camera, and they were especially shaken by the broad idea that all Muslims were being collected within the name of a defensive strategy against terrorists.

As much as the Americans did not like this, the victims (many innocent Muslim people) were especially hurt as they witnessed such horrific events in their home countries. Most were innocent of any ill will and were distressed by the notion that others of their faith were subject to inhuman treatment primarily because of their religious beliefs. A crack had been formed and it was going to be a difficult one to close or cross. Terrorists have thrived on this attack on their religion, which has long been a distinguishing characteristic to recruit and spread their efforts in order provoke terrorist activity.

The seeming confirmation of a western religious “ Jihad” against the Arab world has fed the underlying suspicions of the world and damaged the

opportunity to work together for religious freedom and harmony in a peaceful war free world. This attitude of Americans was suspected but Abu-Ghraib provided the proof that was sought by America's enemies. The question remains, where is America's moral line? Was it crossed so long ago that they cannot see it, or has the line been blurred because they feel they have been wronged in so many ways.

And if so, is what will it take to make the line clear again? or bring them back to the point where they can see what is too much? The torture methods were too harsh, anyone with any moral compass can see that no one deserves to be treated in this way. Have Americans reverted back to the times when violence was the only form of justice? In the case of Abu-Ghraib the majority of American people did not like what they saw. Prior to the disclosure of events at Abu-Ghraib American's main reasons for the need of such torture was to obtain information. They felt that torture was one of the only forms of interrogation and that it was an inconvenient but necessary part of warfare. They believed that the prisoners or detainees would have information about subsequent attacks (Lee 2007: 222).

Great harm could arise if these attacks were not identified and prevented. In their effort to identify the sources, any potential informant was considered fair game for ruthless torture. Realistically, it took only a few to plan an attack and the key players with any detrimental information were difficult to capture and break. In *The Torture Debate in America* by KJ Greenberg references are made to Anthony Lewis, who tells a story of when he was interviewing a prisoner who had been tortured in Argentina. As his account

goes the man turned the interview around and asked him what he would do if he had a prisoner, and knew that he knew that there was a bomb about to go off in a crowded city. Say you knew that it was going to happen within two or three hours. And that you thought that if you tortured this man, you could find out where the bomb was, and you could prevent the terrible loss of life.

Would you do it? ” The interviewer was hesitant but then answered “ Well, I am reluctant, but I guess I would. ” And the man responded, “ No! You cannot start down that road! ” This man had spent time in prison and had been tortured, he is well aware of the gruelling effects and this story shows that he would not torture someone else even if it could save lives. After being tortured you never return to who you were before, the same should go for those who are the torturers. After inflicting that kind of pain on someone you would likely have a difficult time realizing who you are and how you could do such a thing.

It has been observed that abusing human rights has in some cases been considered the “ lesser evil” (Wilson 2005: 19). In Adib-Moghaddam views this is not the case. The evil of abuse and torture was a great evil that set the Americans against the Middle Easterners (who were stereotyped as being all Muslims). In this situation the torture was not in any way a ‘ lesser evil’. The abuse inflicted by the Americans was Bashar and that the change required would pass through Insan to Insanyat, the stage at which mutual religious and cultural tolerance would end the circle of hatred that was paraded before the world with and after the actions of 9/11 and Abu-Ghraib. The world can only hope that this lesson has been learned through all the

recent events of terrorism. In the 1953 Pogo Comic by Walt Kelly a character says “ we have met the enemy, and he is us”. As America looks at their actions and see what they have become they should realize what they have done, and how to fix it.

Someday soon we can dream of a move toward Insanyat and world peace. ?

References: Greenberg, K. J. (2005). Torture Debate in America, The.

New York: Cambridge University Press. Greenberg, K. J. , & Dratel, J. L. (2005).

Torture Papers, The: Road to Abu Ghraib. New York: Cambridge University Press. Kelly, W. (1953). Pogo Comics. Southeastern United states: Post Hall Syndicate Paper. Lee, S. P.

(2007). Intervention, Terrorism, and Torture: Contemporary Challenges to Just War Theory. Springer. Wilson, R. A. (2005).

Human Rights in the ‘ War on Terror’. Cambridge University Press.