

Don't blame Newsweek

Molly Ivins - Creators Syndicate

05.17.05 - AUSTIN, Texas -- As Riley used to say on an ancient television sitcom, "This is a revoltin' development." There seems to be a bit of a campaign on the right to blame Newsweek for the anti-American riots in Afghanistan, Pakistan and other Islamic countries.

Uh, people, I hate to tell you this, but the story about Americans abusing the Koran in order to enrage prisoners has been out there for quite some time. The first mention I found of it is March 17, 2004, when the Independent of London interviewed the first British citizen released from Guantanamo Bay. The prisoner said he had been physically beaten but did not consider that as bad as the psychological torture, which he described extensively. Jamal al-Harith, a computer programmer from Manchester, said 70 percent of the inmates had gone on a hunger strike after a guard kicked a copy of the Koran. The strike was ended by force-feeding.

Then came the report, widely covered in American media last December, by the International Red Cross concerning torture at Gitmo. I wrote at the time: "In the name of Jesus Christ Almighty, why are people representing our government, paid by us, writing filth on the Korans of helpless prisoners? Is this American? Is this Christian? What are our moral values? Where are the clergymen on this? Speak up, speak out."

The reports kept coming: Dec. 30, 2004, "Released Moroccan Guantanamo Detainee Tells Islamist Paper of His Ordeal," reported the Financial Times. "They watched you each time you went to the toilet; the American soldiers used to tear up copies of Koran and throw them in the toilet. ..." said the released prisoner.

On Jan. 9, 2005, Andrew Sullivan, writing in The Sunday Times of London, said: "We now know a great deal about what has gone on in U.S. detention facilities under the Bush administration. Several government and Red Cross reports detail the way many detainees have been treated. We know for certain that the United States has tortured five inmates to death. We know that 23 others have died in U.S. custody under suspicious circumstances. We know that torture has been practiced by almost every branch of the U.S. military in sites all over the world -- from Abu Ghraib to Tikrit, Mosul, Basra, Afghanistan and Guantanamo Bay.

"We know that no incidents of abuse have been reported in regular internment facilities and that hundreds have occurred in prisons geared to getting intelligence. We know that thousands of men, women and children were grabbed almost at random from their homes in Baghdad, taken to Saddam's former torture palace and subjected to abuse, murder, beatings, semi-crucifixions and rape.

"All of this is detailed in the official reports. What has been perpetrated in secret prisons to 'ghost detainees' hidden from Red Cross inspection, we do not know. We may never know.

"This is America? While White House lawyers were arguing about what separates torture from legitimate 'coercive interrogation techniques,' the following was taking place: Prisoners were hanged for hours or days from bars or doors in semi-crucifixions; they were repeatedly beaten unconscious, woken and then beaten again for days on end; they were sodomized; they were urinated on, kicked in the head, had their ribs broken, and were subjected to electric shocks.

"Some Muslims had pork or alcohol forced down their throats; they had tape placed over their mouths for reciting the Koran; many Muslims were forced to be naked in front of each other, members of the opposite sex and sometimes their own families. It was routine for the abuses to be photographed in order to threaten the showing of the humiliating footage to family members."

The New York Times reported on May 1 on the same investigation Newsweek was writing about and interviewed a released Kuwaiti, who spoke of three major hunger strikes, one of them touched off by "guards' handling copies of the Koran, which had been tossed into a pile and stomped on. A senior officer delivered an apology over the camp's loudspeaker system, pledging that such abuses would stop. Interpreters, standing outside each prison block, translated the officer's apology. A former interrogator at Guantanamo, in an interview with the Times, confirmed the accounts of the hunger strikes, including the public expression of regret over the treatment of the Korans."

So where does all this leave us? With a story that is not only true, but previously reported numerous times. So let's drop the "Lynch Newsweek" bull. Seventeen people have died in these riots. They didn't die because of anything Newsweek did -- the riots were caused by what our government has done.

Get your minds around it. Our country is guilty of torture. To quote myself once more: "What are you going to do about this? It's your country, your money, your government. You own this country, you run it, you are the board of directors. They are doing this in your name. The people we elected to public office do what you want them to. Perhaps you should get in touch with them."

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