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## **Failure of accountability: Leaders elude responsibility for Abu Ghraib**

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A Register-Guard Editorial (Eugene, Oregon Newspaper)

Staff Sgt. Ivan "Chip" Frederick was sentenced Thursday to eight years in prison for sexually and physically abusing detainees at Iraq's infamous Abu Ghraib prison. He is the highest ranking of eight soldiers who so far have been formally charged in connection with the prisoner-abuse scandal that did massive damage to the U.S. mission in Iraq and its standing in the world.

Despite clear evidence of complicity by top-level civilian and military leaders, there has been no effort in the Bush administration, the justice system or Congress to hold them accountable.

The low-ranking soldiers, as well as the private contractors who played a role in the abuses, should certainly face justice. But there has yet to be even a scintilla of acknowledgement from the administration that these horrifying incidents can be traced to decisions made at senior levels of the Pentagon and the White House.

Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld tops the list of high-level officials who should be held accountable. It was Rumsfeld who failed to plan for postwar Iraq and failed to make adjustments when a major insurgency arose. It was Rumsfeld whose failure to put enough troops into Iraq left prisons understaffed and overcrowded. It was Rumsfeld who initially failed to issue clear rules on the treatment and interrogation of prisoners.

It was also Rumsfeld who gave the legal advice that prompted the president to declare in a memo that the United States could, at his direction, ignore the Geneva Conventions in waging the "global war on terror." It was Rumsfeld who approved the use of illegal interrogation techniques on detainees at Guantanamo Bay. And it was Rumsfeld who sent Guantanamo's chief jailer to Iraq to brief commanders on the new interrogation methods that played a key role in the abuses in prisons in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Earlier this year, a Pentagon-appointed panel led by former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger documented many of the errors and failures that led up the chain of command from Abu Ghraib to Rumsfeld's office. Yet so far, not one civilian or military leader has paid anything other than a public relations price for the scandal. After a flurry of initial investigations, Abu Ghraib has largely disappeared from the congressional radar screens. No hearings have been scheduled in Congress for nearly two months. Calls for an independent commission similar to the one that reviewed the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, have gone unheeded. Disappointingly, the scandal, which dominated the news only a few months ago, failed to get anything more than a glancing mention in the recent presidential debates.

It now appears doubtful that further congressional action on the Abu Ghraib scandal will be taken before the Nov. 2 election - or possibly even after it. Meanwhile, the Pentagon aggressively pursues the prosecution of low-ranking soldiers such as Staff Sgt. Frederick and proclaims to the world that justice is being done.