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A Sad Miscasting of Women at Gitmo

Kathleen Parker (Op-Ed)
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By now, we can concede that America's prison camp at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, is not a torture-driven gulag and that Sen. Dick Durbin (D., Ill.) was wrong to draw that comparison.

As for his comparison of Guantánamo ("Gitmo") to Stalin's gulags, Hitler's concentration camps, and Pol Pot's human-skull pyramids, one can only surmise that the Illinois senator suffered a temporary fugue or a bout of Tourette's.

The problem with Durbin's rhetorical excess, meanwhile, was that he made it easy - and wrong - to dismiss any and all concerns about prisoner treatment at Gitmo and elsewhere. Just because we're not Hitler or Stalin or Pol Pot doesn't mean our civil-rights record couldn't use some burnishing.

What we know about Abu Ghraib, thanks to the home boys' and girls' photo-journaling, makes decent people cringe, while some reports from Guantánamo should leave conscionable Americans ashamed.

FBI reports from Guantánamo, for instance, record numerous incidents of physical abuse that don't square with the Geneva Conventions. Regardless of whether Gitmo inmates qualify under the conventions - as "enemy combatants," they're not technically entitled to those protections - their treatment at least should be consistent with Americans' "fundamental nature," as former President Bill Clinton put it in a recent Financial Times interview. In the same interview, Clinton urged that the United States either close Gitmo or clean house.

While there are plenty of good reasons to keep Gitmo open - we need some place to hold suspected terrorists, after all - cleaning house seems an excellent idea. Let's begin by getting rid of the women.

As an act of self-respect, as well as diplomacy, we should get women out of male prisons and interrogation centers and put an end to this ignorant, politically correct (forgive the redundancy), morally subversive, counterproductive policy of using women to sexually humiliate men as a means of breaking them down for questioning. From under exactly what rock did the perpetrators of these filthy methods crawl?

Various reports out of Gitmo suggest a consistent pattern of X-rated behavior by women toward men. (For a list taken from documents recently released to the American Civil Liberties Union under the Freedom of Information Act, go to aclu.org/torturefoia/released/052505/.)

Even if such behavior weren't offensive to the Muslim world we're trying to charm with our democratic ways, it should be condemned by us. Instead, it is apparently a policy, if unspoken, to use women in ways we never would condone in civilian life and that certainly would get men punished if roles were reversed. The MO even has a name: the "sex-up" approach. Pithy.

In some instances, (civilian) women interrogators at Gitmo partially stripped, and fondled themselves and the male prisoners, who sometimes were forced to strip in front of women. In one particularly loathsome example related by a former U.S. Army linguist, Sgt. Erik Saar, during a 60 Minutes interview, a female interrogator put her hands in her pants, where she had hidden red ink.

She then wiped her reddened hands on the detainee's face, telling him it was menstrual blood. Again, this clearly doesn't qualify as "torture" compared to electric shock and beatings, but it's still wrong as ballet boots.

And even though this particular prisoner was especially worrisome - a Saudi training at an American flight school - employing a woman to perform some elaborate misogynistic kabuki seems not so much torturous as depraved. The war on terror, which is also a battle of perception, is daunting enough without our handing ammo to the enemy.

Women have a legitimate role in the military and the war on terror, but playing the man-baiting whore is surely a sin of miscasting. And Gitmo, while not the killing camps of Stalin, Pol Pot and Hitler, is not America, either.