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## **Calls for Resignation are Meaningless Without Any Changes in Policy:**

The Guantanamo abuses wouldn't stop were Donald Rumsfeld to go - politicians must be made accountable in other ways

Gary Younge (op-ed)  
The Guardian  
May 1, 2006

If the war on terror is a plan to preserve and promote the values of the civilised world against barbarism, then nobody told Mohammed al-Kahtani. Since Kahtani has been incarcerated in Guantanamo Bay, he has been stripped naked and straddled by a taunting female guard, made to wear knickers on his head and a bra, and told that his mother was a whore. He has been shaved, held on a leash and forced to bark like a dog, put in isolation for five months in a cell continuously flooded with artificial light, deprived of heat, treated to a fake kidnapping and pumped with large quantities of intravenous liquids without access to a toilet so that he urinated on himself.

"Just for the lack of a camera, it would sure look like Abu Ghraib," a military investigator, Lieutenant General Randall Schmidt, told the army inspector general in 2005, referring to Guantanamo.

But unlike Abu Ghraib, responsibility for Kahtani's abuse could not be dumped on a group of working-class part-timers. According to sworn statements by Schmidt that were obtained by Salon.com, the US secretary of defence, Donald Rumsfeld, was "personally involved" in Kahtani's interrogation and spoke every week with the Guantanamo commander involved. Schmidt did not believe that Rumsfeld authorised the methods used against Kahtani, but he did argue that the open-ended policies Rumsfeld pursued had created the conditions for the abuse to take place.

As George Bush reshuffles his cabinet in an attempt to resuscitate the flagging fortunes of his second term, Rumsfeld's position looks safe. But until recently he was the weakest link. A posse of retired generals joined forces to torpedo his political career. They never mentioned Kahtani. Instead, they slammed Rumsfeld for "his absolute failures in managing the war", for "ignoring the advice of seasoned officers", for "a casualness and swagger" that had "alienated his allies".

The desire to see Rumsfeld resign is one that many share. But the schadenfreude of seeing him having to fight for his political life has to be weighed against the specific nature of the attacks and the motivations of those attacking him. For whether it is Rumsfeld or Charles Clarke, the reflexive yearning for the demise of loathsome politicians can, at times, override consideration about the long-term consequences of the terms of their departure. There are some who hover at the scene of every detestable public figure felled by scandal like shameless undertakers, ready to chase the ambulance in the hope that each journey will end in a fatality. Confusing principle with payback, they seek not accountability but revenge - regardless of what sparked the crisis and who will gain from it. And so the personal becomes political and the political becomes perverted.

Take the generals. Most of them were arguing not that Rumsfeld was wrong to take the US to war, but that he should have fought it with more soldiers and greater firepower. A few, like Lieutenant General Gregory Newbold - chief of operations for the joint staff during the early planning of the invasion - did have reservations about the entire enterprise. "I now regret that I did not more openly challenge those who were determined to invade a country whose actions were peripheral to the real threat - al-Qaida."

Fair enough. But those concerns are political, not military. The correct place for Newbold to express those views would not have been in the White House situation room but on the street

with the rest of us. This is no small point. Civilian control of the military is one of the key features that distinguish a democracy from a dictatorship. Rumsfeld's head is simply not worth sacrificing for many of the principles involved here.

The same is true of Clarke and the revelation that more than 1,000 foreign criminals were not deported once they had served their sentence. These people had already been punished. Some of them reoffended and should be punished again, just like native-born criminals. But if their crimes had nothing to do with immigration, what justice is there in deporting them? Clarke is being slated because he did not discriminate against foreigners enough. But the real problem here is not that Clarke did not implement the deportation law, but that the law exists at all. Sadly for him, his incompetence brought together two easy targets in one lurid tabloid headline: "foreigners" and "criminals".

None of which is to say either that Rumsfeld and Clarke should stay, or that we should shed a tear for them if they go. But it is far more important why they go than that they go. Just as Clarke followed David Blunkett, some other reactionary could easily follow him. And there is no shortage of thuggish warmongers in Bush's entourage who can take Rumsfeld's place. Resigning can often be the easy option. Take Peter Mandelson. He resigned twice and ended up in a better job with even greater power.

If it is a progressive shift in policy and politics, rather than personnel, that we seek, then we need progressive pressure from below to make that happen. If Clarke were to be forced out because of public pressure over ID cards or his anti-terror legislation, that would demand a change in government thinking.

The same would be true for Rumsfeld and the White House if there had been a huge upswell of outrage over the Abu Ghraib revelations that had a similar effect on the Bush administration. But - five months after the atrocities were exposed - the issue did not feature in the presidential election. The fact that people were unable to muster a sufficient outrage to ensure the ouster of both Clarke and Rumsfeld is regrettable - but we can't short-circuit that process by riding the coat-tails of generals and xenophobes and rejoice because they resigned for something else.

What has been lacking on both sides of the Atlantic - particularly over the past three years - has been accountability. The issue is not so much that these people don't resign, but rather that those who stay refuse to take responsibility for anything they do. Holding leaders accountable demands linking their individual acts to the institutional cultures that made the acts possible. That might result in resignation, but the ramifications are more far-reaching - for the issue in question and for the democracy at large - than the fate of one person.

Which brings us back to Kahtani. By all accounts, the Saudi national is no angel. Described by military investigators as the "20th hijacker", he was allegedly booked on the flight headed for the White House that crashed in a Pennsylvania field. Before he was arrested in Afghanistan they say he met several times with Osama bin Laden and had been trained in al-Qaida camps. Whether all this is true or not is irrelevant. Al-Qaida never signed the Geneva convention; the US did. By violating both the letter and the spirit of international law regarding the treatment of detainees, Rumsfeld effectively turned himself into a war criminal. The fact that terrorists stand outside international norms of combat and democratic oversight is what separates "them" from "us". Erase that distinction and the war on terror morphs into a war of terror.

"The question at this point is not whether Rumsfeld should resign," Joanne Mariner, of Human Rights Watch, told Progressive magazine. "It's whether he should be indicted."

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