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Torture Chicks Gone Wild

MAUREEN DOWD (Op-Ed)
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By the time House Republicans were finished with him, Bill Clinton must have thought of a thong as a torture device.

For the Bush administration, it actually is.

A former American Army sergeant who worked as an Arabic interpreter at Gitmo has written a book pulling back the veil on the astounding ways female interrogators used a toxic combination of sex and religion to try to break Muslim detainees at the U.S. prison camp in Cuba. It's not merely disgusting. It's beyond belief.

The Bush administration never worries about anything. But these missionaries and zealous protectors of values should be worried about the American soul. The president never mentions Osama, but he continues to use 9/11 as an excuse for American policies that bend the rules and play to our worst instincts.

"I have really struggled with this because the detainees, their families and much of the world will think this is a religious war based on some of the techniques used, even though it is not the case," the former sergeant, Erik R. Saar, 29, told The Associated Press. The A.P. got a manuscript of his book, deemed classified pending a Pentagon review.

What good is it for President Bush to speak respectfully of Islam and claim Iraq is not a religious war if the Pentagon denigrates Islamic law - allowing its female interrogators to try to make Muslim men talk in late-night sessions featuring sexual touching, displays of fake menstrual blood, and parading in miniskirt, tight T-shirt, bra and thong underwear?

It's like a bad porn movie, "The Geneva Monologues." All S and no M.

The A.P. noted that "some Guantánamo prisoners who have been released say they were tormented by 'prostitutes.' "

Mr. Saar writes about what he calls "disturbing" practices during his time in Gitmo from December 2002 to June 2003, including this anecdote related by Paisley Dodds, an A.P. reporter:

A female military interrogator who wanted to turn up the heat on a 21-year-old Saudi detainee who allegedly had taken flying lessons in Arizona before 9/11 removed her uniform top to expose a snug T-shirt. She began belittling the prisoner - who was praying with his eyes closed - as she touched her breasts, rubbed them against the Saudi's back and commented on his apparent erection.

After the prisoner spat in her face, she left the room to ask a Muslim linguist how she could break the prisoner's reliance on God. The linguist suggested she tell the prisoner that she was menstruating, touch him, and then shut off the water in his cell so he couldn't wash.

"The concept was to make the detainee feel that after talking to her he was unclean and was unable to go before his God in prayer and gain strength," Mr. Saar recounted, adding: "She then started to place her hands in her pants as she walked behind the detainee. As she circled around him he could see that she was taking her hand out of her pants. When it became visible the

detainee saw what appeared to be red blood on her hand. She said, 'Who sent you to Arizona?' He then glared at her with a piercing look of hatred. She then wiped the red ink on his face. He shouted at the top of his lungs, spat at her and lunged forward," breaking out of an ankle shackle.

"He began to cry like a baby," the author wrote, adding that the interrogator's parting shot was: "Have a fun night in your cell without any water to clean yourself."

A female civilian contractor kept her "uniform" - a thong and miniskirt - on the back of the door of an interrogation room, the author says.

Who are these women? Who allows this to happen? Why don't the officers who allow it get into trouble? Why do Rummy and Paul Wolfowitz still have their jobs?

The military did not deny the specifics, but said the prisoners were treated "humanely" and in a way consistent "with legal obligations prohibiting torture." However the Bush White House is redefining torture these days, the point is this: Such behavior degrades the women who are doing it, the men they are doing it to, and the country they are doing it for.

There's nothing wrong with trying to squeeze information out of detainees. But isn't it simply more effective to throw them in isolation and try to build some sort of relationship?

I doubt that the thong tease works as well on inmates at Gitmo as it did on Bill Clinton in the Oval Office.