

Manhunting and Kidnapping of “Terrorists”:

The Pentagon's Special-access program (SAP)

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Dozens were kidnapped by roving gangs off the streets of their hometowns, disappeared from families, hooded, chained, repeatedly interrogated, incarcerated for years in military prisons, and then told it was all a mistake. Did this happen in Stalinist Russia, some South American military dictatorship, Apartheid South Africa? No, the gangs were special forces of the US Government operating with approval from the highest levels of the Pentagon, the victims Afghan civilians recently released from the Guantanamo military prison camp in Cuba.

The New York Times published an article April 20 reporting how 17 innocent Afghans were recently freed from Guantanamo prison after three and half years. “Several of the Afghans said in interviews that they had been told by American officers that they were being freed because they were innocent of any crime,” the article reported. “The men would be given new clothes, turbans and travel money and allowed to go home,” the paper disclosed.

Prior to the release of the Guantanamo prisoners last Fall, Seymour Hersh fully exposed the US’s worldwide abuse of power and violation of human right in articles published in the Guardian and New Yorker. Hersh documented that Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, with approval from the White House, had authorized a special-access program (SAP) to go on global manhunts for terrorists. It was deemed OK to kidnap suspected terrorists and take them to countries that would get tough (torture) them during interrogations. Several hundred people captured wholesale in Afghanistan and transported to Cuba were deemed enemy non-combatants without rights of due process or coverage under the Geneva Convention.

The New York Times’ story covers the release of the internees without Hersh’s historical context of high level official approval. Additionally, the NY Times story fails to address coverage of how, in a country that supports due process and human rights, our military could take such tragic action violating the rights of these men and their families. Instead the story implies that the kidnapping of these Afghans was justified in that undoubtedly some of the prisoners were guilty. This is like rounding up the church choir because the minister was caught in bed with the organist.

Failure to publish the full truth regarding the release of the Afghan prisoners is a strong indication that the New York Times and corporate media groups in general are unable and unwilling to fully address human right violations by our own government. The broad publication of stories about the breach of human rights by our national security forces is inconsistent with corporate media’s continuing desire to have 24 hour access to sources of news inside the White House, Pentagon and State Department. This failure of nerve to

support the public's right to know and insure a transparent governmental process is undoubtedly giving America a black eye in the world community. Increasingly America is seen as an uncontrolled empire of power and abuse. For many in the world we are the Darth Vaders of the planet – pure evil incorporated.

Non-Americans know that the people in the US do not approve of these practices. We must, however, openly share their outrage and demand that America hold to our values of due process and human rights. To do this we must support media that address these issues. We need a media that post and recognize the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights in every newsroom. Anything less cuts at the very soul of the American people.

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