

United-States: From Ferguson to CIA Torture Cells

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Two current high-profile stories—police killings of Black people and the secret torture prisons run by the U.S. military and CIA in the “war on terror”—might seem separate and distinct. In truth, the path between them is short. A system that tortures prisoners abroad will murder people at home, and the targeted populations are not randomly chosen. There are several common elements:

1. Dehumanization. In order to subject someone to waterboarding, sleep deprivation, freezing, or stretching until their tendons rip and bones break, the torturer has to regard the prisoner as both subhuman and dangerous, inherently unworthy of life. To gun down or choke to death unarmed people on the pretext that they might have sold loose cigarettes or shoplifted a box of cigars, or a kid holding a toy gun, the police must regard those people and their communities as collectively and individually criminal, “animal-like” as officer Darren Wilson described Michael Brown, and too dangerous to come under the protection of human rights and due process.

2. Routinization. Torture of “terrorism suspects,” we’re told, began with CIA and U.S. government panic in the wake of the intelligence failure to detect the 9/11 attacks. It became a commonplace, institutional routine in the following years, even when it produced no authentic information. In the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, night raids by “coalition” troops on villages and homes were standard practice, with huge civilian deaths.

In Black and Latino communities, institutional practices like stop-and-frisk in New York, or the regular practice of driving-while-Black and walking-while-Black arrests to fund Ferguson and other St. Louis County municipalities, or grabbing immigrant parents dropping off their kids at school, become standard daily routines of policing. It’s a permanent “low-intensity conflict” from which daily abuse escalates all the way to confrontations and deadly force.

3. Control. The purpose of torture, as its expert practitioners testify, is to achieve complete subservience of the subject – to the point where a detainee would voluntarily walk to the waterboarding table when the torturer snapped his fingers. In today’s America, police instruct Black community meetings that in how young people should comply with orders so not to be blown away – which of course normalizes and further emboldens police provocative behavior, deepens resentment and increases the likelihood of confrontations turning explosive and lethal.

4. Impunity. There is never prosecution for police who murder unarmed Black civilians, just as there is always political protection for the CIA and military torturers and the higher-ups who gave them the orders. This, unfortunately, is so consistent that the agents of the state who carry out these practices can take it for granted that they will face no consequences.

Intimate Connections

But the connections between torture, drone strikes, and civilian killings abroad and murderous police brutality at home go beyond these important commonalities. Military adventures in the service of imperialism produce a militarized apparatus of control at home, which functions on

several levels.

First, there is the consequence of wasted resources. Communities of color are criminalized because they're impoverished, starved of services and education, and have much of their youth thrown on the scrap heap of structural unemployment. In no small part, that's because hundreds of billions of dollars every year go to feed the military machine at the expense of urgent human needs. All kinds of "surplus" military hardware get funneled into U.S. police departments in the same communities that lack funding for jobs and education that they desperately require.

Second, the realities of war need to be kept hidden from an increasingly skeptical public. Keeping secrets requires constant monitoring and surveillance of opposition and "subversion," whether imagined or real. Communities where opposition tends to be strongest and perceived as "dangerous" are of course those of people of color and immigrants—including in the present wars, of course, Arab and Muslim communities. And the methods of infiltration, intimidation, and repression deployed against one "unruly" sector of the population naturally spread.

Much of the repression and abuse occurs under the radar screen of mainstream media and white society, which largely feels unaffected until the events in Ferguson and Staten Island, or the torture revelations, explode into the headlines. Why that takes so long would take us into a lengthy discussion of both class and white supremacy. Suffice it here to say that breaking the curtains of silence on America's social disaster at home and imperial crimes abroad, their intimate connections and the surprisingly short road from one to the other, is an essential step in getting our society to face its real condition.

The Political Committee of Solidarity

P.S.

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