

Cheney Threatens GOP Anti-Torture Efforts

by Edward Spannaus

As the Senate comes back into session, a major battle is shaping up over Republican-sponsored amendments prohibiting torture and requiring humane treatment of military prisoners. Before the Senate recessed in July, Vice President Dick Cheney threatened that the White House would veto the entire Defense Authorization bill, if it included these amendments, on the grounds that they would “interfere” with the President’s conduct of the war on terrorism.

In seeking to legislate standards for detention and interrogation of detainees, these Senators were, in fact, simply fulfilling their duties under the U.S. Constitution, which, in Section I, Article 8, gives Congress the authority to “make Rules for the Government and Regulation of the land and naval forces,” and to “make Rules concerning Captures on Land and Water.”

The amendments to the defense bill were originally offered by Sen. John Warner (R-Va.), the chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and two other committee members, Lindsey Graham (R-S.C.), a former military prosecutor, and John McCain (R-Ariz.), who was subjected to torture and brutality as a prisoner of war in North Vietnam.

Indicative of the broader support for the amendments, was the fact that seven Republicans voted against Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist’s attempt to shut down debate on the Defense Authorization bill in late July. They were Wayne Allard of Colorado, Susan Collins of Maine, Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, Trent Lott of Mississippi, John McCain, Olympia Snow of Maine, and John Thune of South Dakota. As a result, the cloture vote wasn’t even close, falling ten votes short of what was necessary. Over the August recess, support among Republicans for the amendments has increased. According to two legal sources, there are now between 8 and 12 Republican Senators who are prepared to support the anti-torture amendments. Since most—if not all—Democratic Senators will support the amendments, their passage seems assured, and Cheney is reportedly threatening to organize a filibuster in order to try to block their passage.

‘All the Way Up to Cheney’

Another pending amendment, offered by Sen. Carl Levin (D-Mich.), would establish a national commission on policies and practices on the treatment of detainees since Sept. 11, 2001.

Further evidence that such an independent investigation

is needed—unless the Senate itself will decide to conduct it—came out in an early August interview with now-retired Army Reserve Brig. Gen. Janis Karpinski, who was nominally in command of Baghdad’s Abu Ghraib prison, and is the highest-ranking officer to be reprimanded for what happened there. In the interview, published in Truthout.org, Karpinski declared that responsibility for the abuse and torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib goes “all the way up to Cheney.”

Karpinski ridiculed the fact that the White House and Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld keep saying that there have been 15 investigations of prisoner abuse; she pointed out that “every one of those investigations is under the control of the Secretary of Defense,” and, she insisted, “We’re never going to know the truth until they do an independent commission or look into this independently.”

“This is about instructions delivered with full authority and knowledge of the Secretary of Defense and probably Cheney,” Karpinski continued. “I don’t know if the President was involved or not. . . . All I know is, those instructions were communicated from the Secretary of Defense’s office, from the Pentagon, through Cambone, through Miller, to Abu Ghraib”—referring to the Undersecretary of Defense for Intelligence, Stephen Cambone, and to former Guantanamo commander Maj. Gen. Geoffrey Miller.

According to Miller’s testimony to the Senate last year, Cambone sent his top assistant, Gen. William Boykin, to Guantanamo in the Summer of 2003, with orders to deploy Miller to Iraq to revamp detention and interrogation operations there. Both Boykin and Miller have been identified to *EIR*, as key links between the “spoon-bender” gang in the military, and the torture policies carried out at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. (See “Cheney’s ‘Spoonbenders’ Pushing Nuclear Armageddon,” *EIR*, Aug. 26.)

Karpinski pointed out that when Miller arrived at Abu Ghraib, “he said that he was going to use a template from Guantanamo Bay to ‘Gitmo-ize’ the operations out at Abu Ghraib.” Miller told Karpinski that he wanted Abu Ghraib. Karpinski replied: “Abu Ghraib is not mine to give to you. It belongs to Ambassador Bremer. It is going to be turned over to the Iraqis.” She says that Miller replied, “No, it is not. I want that facility and [Gen.] Rick Sanchez said I can have any facility I want.” Karpinski adds, “Miller obviously had the full authority of somebody, you know, likely Cambone or Rumsfeld in Washington.” A knowledgeable source told *EIR* that when Miller was in Iraq in 2003, Sanchez was frequently on the phone with Rumsfeld, and as a result, Sanchez gave Miller everything he asked for.

What Karpinski said in this interview, is consistent with her sworn statement in a deposition taken in July 2004 by military investigators. She testified that when Miller came to Iraq, he said that he was there to implement, in Iraq, the interrogation techniques used at Guantanamo. She also said that Miller told her and others, “You have to treat these detainees like dogs.”