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Cruel Science: CIA Torture and U.S. Foreign Policy

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Abstract

The roots of the recent Abu Ghraib prisoner-abuse scandal lie in CIA torture techniques that have metastasized inside the U.S. intelligence community for the past fifty years. A contradictory U.S. foreign policy marked by both public opposition to torture and secret propagation of its practice has influenced American response to UN treaties, shaped federal anti-torture statutes, and produced a succession of domestic political scandals. After a crash research effort in the 1950s, the CIA developed a revolutionary new paradigm of psychological torture and then, for the next thirty years, disseminated it to allies worldwide. After September 11, the U.S. media created a public consensus for torture while the Bush administration launched a covert hunt for Al Qaeda -- a campaign that included the CIA's distinctive method of psychological torture developed over forty years before. Though seemingly less brutal, psychological torture is more problematic because it has potentially devastating domestic and international consequences.

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