



## Human-rights voices fall silent when U.S. targeted

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Colaboraciones n° 1070

July 6, 2006

In recent days, two American soldiers, Pfc. Kristian Menchaca of Houston, Texas, and Pfc. Thomas Tucker of Madras, Ore., were taken prisoner in Iraq. They were brutally tortured, and so severely mutilated that their faces were unrecognizable. They were tied together with a bomb between their legs -- a booby trap intended to kill whoever tried to recover their remains for burial.

Would you regard such actions as serious violations of the laws of war and fundamental human rights? It is not clear that the wealthiest and most powerful human rights organizations see it that way.

For example, Amnesty International, which claims that its mission is "to protect human rights worldwide," appears to have little to say about the torture and killing of Menchaca and Tucker. As I write this, its website features instead an article on arms control, and another

on a "new international treaty to prevent torture and other ill-treatment through a system of regular visits to all detention places." Evidently, "all detention places" does not include visits to the places in Iraq where Al-Qaida and Baathist forces detain their prisoners -- briefly, in most instances.

The home page of Human Rights Watch suggests that the group's main concerns at the moment are Indonesia, Burundi and Chad. Regarding Menchaca and Tucker, there is a three-sentence press release noting that "captured combatants must be treated humanely."

At the website of the United Nations, I found no statement whatsoever by Secretary General Kofi Annan concerning the abuse and slaughter of American soldiers. Nor, evidently, has the recently "reformed" U.N. Human Rights Council deigned to express an opinion.

However, the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, was moved recently to accuse the United States of maintaining secret detention centers in which torture is alleged to take place. Reports of such centers -- she doesn't actually know whether they exist -- are of "grave concern," Arbour said.

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. John Bolton responded diplomatically, saying Arbour's remarks reflected "misplaced priorities."

"For all the human rights problems in the world in places like North Korea and Iran and so on, to go after the United States and Israel -- it is business as usual from the U.N. human rights machinery," Bolton told reporters.

Bolton is right to suggest that, in addition to the United States, Israel is the favorite whipping boy of the U.N. and the self-styled and so-called "human rights community." Recently, these groups gave immediate credence to Palestinian allegations that Israeli artillery fire had killed civilians picnicking on a Gaza Beach. They gave short shrift to Israeli officials who insisted their weapons had not caused the carnage.

Nor does it matter to these groups that when Israel does fire into Gaza, it is aiming at militants who are launching missiles at Israeli villages. Such missiles were being fired from within a few hundred yards of that Gaza beach on that day.

What explains this double standard? Why are these groups continually trying to tie the hands of those fighting terrorism while turning a blind eye to the terrorists themselves?

One could argue that it's a kind of compliment, that those who run the organizations expect America and Israel to maintain higher standards. But war is not golf: You don't handicap those you view as stronger players to make the contest more exciting.

One could speculate that these groups do, in fact, deeply disapprove of all torture and killing, and of missile attacks on schools -- they just don't believe that Islamic extremists routinely carrying out such atrocities would listen to them.

But why not? Imagine if Kofi Annan were to say: "Those who consider themselves members of resistance or liberation movements must abide by international law. If they refuse to do that, they should not expect international law to protect them."

Consider what it would mean if Amnesty International would say: "Even those who have not signed the Geneva Convention must observe its rules, must respect the human rights of those they fight and, even more, of noncombatants. If you violate the norms of civilized behavior, do not expect us to defend your rights."

Try to hear Human Rights Watch announcing: "We will not establish the precedent that it is an outrage for Al-Qaida members to be de-

tained in Guantanamo but acceptable for captured American soldiers to be butchered."

They could make such statements. They choose not to. If they'd like to explain why, I'm sure many of us would be only too pleased to listen.

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