

# Human rights ill-served by war

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I am deeply outraged and offended by President Bush's selective use of Amnesty International information to justify and gain support for war with Iraq.

In an interview with David Frost aired on PBS Jan. 2, President Bush cited an Amnesty International U.S.A. report on human rights violations in Iraq and occupied Kuwait since Aug. 2. Bush related graphic descriptions of the torture of handicapped children, rape, torture by electric shock applied to the genitals, and the murder of over 300 babies. He echoed these concerns in a letter sent the second week of January to over 450 college newspapers.

My anger and resentment come not from the fact that the president gave misinformation. The human rights violations cited by Bush are quite accurate and can be verified by the report "Iraq/Occupied Kuwait - Human Rights Violations Since August 2, 1990" (Dec. 1990, AIUSA, 322 Eighth Ave., New York, NY 10001, \$5.) Bush acts as if these practices are new and particularly extraordinary in their vulgarity.

Amnesty International has been documenting such practices by the government of Iraq for over 10 years. Sadly, the torture and other violations mentioned above, as well as numerous other abuses, are daily occurrences in many countries. Torture is routine and widespread in Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey, all U.N. coalition partners and U.S. allies. The state of Israel also commits many human rights violations. Over the years, Amnesty International has issued reports on all of these nations.

George Bush, both as president and as vice president under Ronald Reagan, has ignored Amnesty International reports prior to this January. The president's sudden concern for human rights on Jan. 2 marks an about-face on the issue for the Republican administrations of the last 10 years. Bush's use of Amnesty International information now is nothing more than selective manipulation of the human rights record to promote his own political and military agenda and not a true concern for human rights. Governments have manipulated Amnesty International information many times before to suit their purposes and political agendas. I am deeply saddened and ashamed that my own government has now taken up this practice.

Amnesty International issues reports on human rights violations for one purpose and one purpose only: to protest human rights abuses. By issuing such information, Amnesty hopes to generate public pressure on governments. Amnesty International members the world over are continually sen-

cards to officials of offending world governments demanding an end to the abuses. President Bush has used Amnesty International reports to generate public outrage which he hopes to channel into support for war.

Whatever President Bush's reasons for attacking Iraq are, concern for human rights is not one of them. If George Bush were truly concerned for human rights he would have spoken out strongly against China for the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 3 and 4, 1989 that saw soldiers of the People's Army open fire on unarmed civilians killing over 1,000 and wounding thousands of others. If George Bush were a true champion of human rights he would rethink his administration's policy on El Salvador where over 70,000 opponents of the U.S.-backed government have disappeared, been tortured and extra-judicially executed in the last 10 years. A pro-human rights George Bush would be a vocal opponent of the abuses in South Africa.

If George Bush really wants a new world order in which human rights are respected, he should start with the coalition partners and U.S. allies. While his interest in human rights is at a peak I suggest that the president read "Amnesty International Report 1990," (AI Publications, 1 Easton St., London WC1X 8DJ, UK) a country-by-country report on Amnesty's human rights concerns for the year 1989. In this report he will find the following information on such friends of the U.S. as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Israel, Turkey and Syria:

- During 1989 in Kuwait, 20 suspected opponents of the government were arrested. Some of these were reported to have been tortured. One detainee, Abd al-Hamid al-Saffar was tortured and told his daughter would be assaulted in his presence if he refused to "confess."

- In Saudi Arabia, 1989 saw 27 prisoners of conscience imprisoned, 70 people held without charge or trial, and 111 executed - 16 for their political opinion. Torture and amputation were common.

- Some 25,000 Palestinians were arrested in Israel in 1989. 13,000 were still in prisons or detention centers at the end of the year. Amnesty identified 45 prisoners of conscience, most of them conscientious objectors. Thousands were beaten or tortured at the hands of Israeli security forces. Eight deaths were reported as the result of torture or beatings. Over 260 unarmed Palestinian civilians were shot dead by security forces. More than half of these victims were under the age of 18, and 20 were under the age of 12.

- Thousands were imprisoned for political reasons in Turkey in 1989. Hundreds of prisoners of conscience remained in jail. Courts did not



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meet international standards of fair trial. The use of torture was widespread and systematic, sometimes resulting in death. Detainees invariably reported the same methods of torture: falaqa (beatings on the soles of the feet), hosing with ice-cold water and electric shocks applied to the genitals.

- Hundreds of prisoners of conscience remained in jail in Syria in 1989. Some have been in jail for over 20 years, the majority without charge or trial. Torture was in wide and routine use.

- In Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Iran the patterns of abuse are similar to the ones mentioned above.

In fact, if George Bush really wants a new world order, maybe he should begin with the United States. In this country, American Indian activist Leonard Peltier remains our most celebrated political prisoner. Amnesty International has alleged torture in the U.S. government continues to deny political asylum to hundreds fleeing political violence in Haiti because the U.S. terms the government "stable."

If President Bush wishes to be a true advocate of human rights, he will call to task all governments committing human rights abuses (including his own) and not cite just those abuses committed by military opponents in order to further agendas other than those of the human rights movement.

Editor's note: Mr. Lorenzen is a resident of Leominster and a member of Amnesty International, the worldwide human rights organization, where he is co-ordinator of the local chapter in Worcester.