

[Please see our PowerPoint presentation on "Arrest John Yoo" for pictures of the signs and detailed explanation of poster campaign.](#)

By Jay Youngdahl

From [East Bay Express](#) | Original Article

Plastered on poles along **Telegraph Avenue** in Berkeley near **Sproul Plaza** are posters exclaiming "**John Yoo** — War Criminal." Yoo, of course, was the prime legal enabler of torture in the Justice Department of President **George Bush**, and now teaches at Cal's **Boalt Hall School of Law**. Given the most recent torture revelations by **WikiLeaks**, and the shameful mainstream media responses to them, I am proud of whoever put those posters up.

Last week several major newspapers published stories based on 391,832 previously secret US military field reports that detail the often unreported realities of the war in Iraq. These newly leaked US government documents came from the web site WikiLeaks, and expose revelations of grotesque policies by our government and its allies in the war in Iraq.

The war logs showed that it was the US government's strategy to hand over Iraqi prisoners to our allies fully cognizant that this is what awaited these victims. The *Guardian* reported that "Hundreds of the leaked war logs reflect the fertile imagination of the torturer faced with the entirely helpless victim — bound, gagged, blindfolded and isolated — who is whipped by men in uniforms using wire cables, metal rods, rubber hoses, wooden stakes, TV antennae, plastic water pipes, engine fan belts or chains. At the torturer's whim, the logs reveal, the victim can be hung by his wrists or by his ankles; knotted up in stress positions; sexually molested or raped; tormented with hot peppers, cigarettes, acid, pliers or boiling water — and always with little fear of retribution since, far more often than not, if the Iraqi official is assaulting an Iraqi civilian, no

further investigation will be required."

The major American news outlets find this to be old news and have spent little time on it. But it is crucial to write and report about this torture because this kind of conduct is corrosive to all that is good about our country. The effects will be profound and far-reaching. We cannot let it go unaired or unchallenged.

The leaks confirm what many Americans believe — that our government is staffed by liars at the very highest levels. The documents show that conscious governmental activity hid the true number of deaths in the war and the amount of torture that went on.

The prevalence of torture as official US policy supports hatred of Americans by confirming our country's standing throughout the world as a scofflaw. At this time of declining US economic power, this is very important. The UN has called on the president to order a full investigation of US forces' involvement in these abuses under the **UN Convention against Torture**. **Manfred Nowak**

, the UN's chief investigator on torture, said that UN human rights agreements obliged states to criminalize every form of torture, whether directly or indirectly, and to investigate any allegations of abuse. This administration's refusal to do this makes them international law breakers, he has concluded.

In addition to our government's law breaking, the justification of torture pushes those who become implicit in it, explicitly or not, into hypocritical positions, as, for instance, UC Berkeley has been permanently besmirched by manufacturing a definition of academic freedom that protects torturers like Yoo. In order to protect torturers, the Obama administration has had to work to expand, in a Nixonian fashion, a definition of executive power that is scary for ordinary Americans. And, since anything "we" do is good and anything "they" do is bad, we now have the bizarre situation in which "Terrorism = bad and torture = good." Tell me the moral code that supports this interpretation.

The most important damage from this whole affair comes in this corruption of our own country's morality. It serves to destroy whatever moral compass we have left as a people.

Sure, we can block out images of torture. We can try and keep our kids from hearing about it or

watching it. But hundreds or thousands of American troops who either participated in torture or saw it go on are coming home. They will be indelibly scarred by this inhumane activity, like the vets of the Vietnam War who lived a life of emotional turmoil after their service. We cannot erase them. Last year 239 soldiers killed themselves and another 1,713 soldiers survived suicide events. A **RAND Corporation** study found that one third of returning troops had mental-health problems. Those who were involved in torture are sure to be in the worse shape of all. The **Iraq Veterans Against the War**, a hearty group of 2,000 veterans and active duty military, has issued a call for accountability from those who sent them to war.

Additionally, the official attitude toward torture justifies and legitimates cruelty between people. How are we supposed to get worked up about human-rights abuses in Darfur and other troubled spots when our country participates in the same type of conduct? Closer to home, this activity has the effect of marginalizing action against worrisome antisocial activity. How can we lecture kids about the evils of bullying when they hear that their leaders are engaged in activity far more reprehensible than bullying?

It is disgusting and distasteful, but the spotlight must stay on torture if our nation is to reclaim our tarnished humanity. So, I, for one, will continue to appreciate those veterans who expose what they were ordered to do as well as those who put up those war criminal posters on Telegraph. They are doing important work.