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American Death Squad

Posted By [Justin Raimondo](#) On May 19, 2009 @ 9:00 pm In [Uncategorized](#) | [9 Comments](#)

As the story of Bush administration's war crimes comes out in fits and starts, it appears that torture is only one aspect – and not the worst, by any means – of this horrific history. In an interview in mid-March, Seymour Hersh let slip [the following](#):

"After 9/11 – I haven't written about this yet – but the Central Intelligence Agency was very deeply involved in domestic activities against people they thought to be enemies of the state. Without any legal authority for it. They haven't been called on it yet. That does happen."

Well, yes, that's hardly surprising. The [PATRIOT Act](#) and [other legislation](#) [.pdf] passed by Congress gives the government the legal "right" to spy on American citizens and, in the case of [Jose Padilla](#), lock them up without a trial and throw away the key. But, as Hersh reveals, it gets worse. Much worse:

"Right now, today, there was [a story in the New York Times](#) that if you read it carefully mentioned something known as the Joint Special Operations Command – JSOC it's called. It is a special wing of our special operations community that is set up independently. They do not report to anybody, except in the Bush-Cheney days, they reported directly to the Cheney office. They did not report to the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff or to Mr. [Robert] Gates, the secretary of defense. They reported directly to him. ...

"Congress has no oversight of it. It's an executive assassination ring essentially, and it's been going on and on and on. ... Under President Bush's authority, they've been going into countries, not talking to the ambassador or the CIA station chief, and finding people on a list and executing them and leaving. That's been going on, in the name of all of us."

Well, yes, that's not too surprising, either, actually. It's so – what's the word? – [Cheneyesque](#). Those Rethuglicans! Well, we're past [all that](#) now. The Dear Leader's in the White House, and it's time to move on, right? Oh wait...

It turns out [the commander](#) of this international order of assassins has just been appointed by Defense Secretary Robert Gates to head of U.S. forces in Afghanistan. As part of the "fresh thinking" in the Obama administration, [epitomized](#) by the COIN crowd, Lt. Gen. Stanley McChrystal replaces Gen. [David McKiernan](#). So who is McChrystal? A 2006 profile in *Newsweek* put it this way:

"JSOC is part of what Vice President Dick Cheney was referring to when he said America would have to 'work the dark side' after 9/11. To many critics, the veep's remark back in 2001 fostered his rep as the Darth Vader of the war on terror and presaged bad things to come, like the interrogation abuses at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay. But America also has its share of Jedi Knights who are fighting in what Cheney calls 'the shadows.' And McChrystal, an affable but tough Army Ranger, and the Delta Force and other elite teams he

commands are among them."

The dark side includes McChrystal's overseeing of [Camp Nama](#), a detainee center outside of Baghdad (since renamed and relocated) notorious for its brutality. The very same administration that is up on its high horse about [forbidding torture](#) has just elevated one of the chief torturers to direct Obama's war in Afghanistan. It is hardly inconceivable that what we saw at Camp Nama – beatings, degradation of prisoners, and outright, cold-blooded [murder](#) – is going to be replicated on a nationwide scale.

That's what they call "fresh thinking" over at Obama's Pentagon.

The response to all this – or, rather, the non-response – indicates to me that torture is not really the issue, as far as the Obamaites and their amen corner in the media are concerned, it's who's doing the torturing. If Bush and Cheney ordered it, it's reprehensible and might even be a war crime. If, however, a known torture-enabler is elevated by Obama's secretary of defense to the position of commander of our armed forces in Afghanistan – well, then, that's [a far different matter](#).

Yes, I know, it's hard to believe such brazen hypocrisy really exists, but here it is, right in front of us, in the person of Human Rights Watch investigator [Marc Garlasco](#). Garlasco, who investigated and helped expose the abuses at Camp Nama, thinks the question of whether McChrystal ought to be confirmed as Afghan commander is "[a tough one](#)." Really? Well, yes, according to him:

"I defend McChrystal to myself because I think he's the right guy for the job. [He is] in the Petraeus model, a new-thinking guy who is not thinking in terms of massive troops and kinetic kills, but non-lethal power – economic issues, winning the population over. In that mold, he's the right guy."

It was McChrystal who had operational command over Camp Nama. He [kept out](#) the International Red Cross, and he was personally present in the camp while torture was going on. Now he's going to be overseeing the conduct of [the "Af-Pak" war](#), so don't be too surprised to see an entire country, and portions of another, turned into one giant Camp Nama. What gets me is that it's all being done in the name of a [kinder, gentler approach](#) to the "art" of counterinsurgency, and presided over by the best, the brightest, the most liberal administration since FDR.

I don't know what's worse: the crimes themselves, or those who rationalize them, such as the author of the *Esquire* piece that exposed Camp Nama, linked to above, who has decided that McChrystal is one of the good guys – and that Cheney might not be that bad after all. A more egregious apologia has never been uttered, at least not since the war criminals of yesteryear declared they were [only following orders](#). Okay, he admits, excusing Cheney may be going a bit "too far," but hands off McChrystal – and, of course, Obama.

That someone so conversant with the abuses perpetrated by Commander Dark Side could take this position is an indicator of just how far the moral corruption that characterized the Bush era has penetrated – and how long it's going to take for us to return to some semblance of normality. Author John H. Richardson ridicules McChrystal's critics as "[armchair moralists](#)," to which the only appropriate reply is: Better an armchair moralist than an armchair torturer and executioner.

Yet Camp Nama is hardly the worst of McChrystal's walks on the "dark side." Remember, Hersh reported that JSOC was (and presumably still is) going around killing "high-value targets" [on a global scale](#), murdering people from the Middle East to Central America. The criterion for selecting the victims was (and presumably still is) whether, in Hersh's phrase, they had engaged in or were planning "anti-American activities."

Isn't anyone curious as to who qualified for a hit? Congress is threatening to investigate the use of torture techniques during interrogations, but what about the murderous rampage we've been conducting for the past eight years? Who fell victim to our army of assassins?

Along these lines, I note a [completely phony](#) – and obviously planted – [story](#) that "reports" Hersh saying JSOC murdered Rafik Hariri, the Lebanese leader whose assassination set off a countrywide crisis. He has naturally [denied](#) saying this, but what's interesting is that the false story was timed just as [questions](#) about McChrystal's tenure at JSOC and Camp Nama were being raised. Not that the U.S. government or anyone connected with it would ever try to discredit one of its most credible critics – heaven forbid!

With the appointment, and likely confirmation, of McChrystal, it is clear that the "change" we were promised by Obama is just a change of faces: the policies, at least on the foreign policy front, are remarkably similar. Indeed, the Obamaites may prove to be even more brutal and arrogant than their immediate predecessors, and they'll get away with it far longer than the Bushies did. That's because the media is in the tank for Obama, as our fundraising copy put it the other day – just like Marc Garlasco.

Speaking of our fundraising drive: we're going into the final stretch now, and this is a good time to remind all of you out there that Antiwar.com is performing an essential function, ensuring that the hopes and dreams of the many antiwar voters who cast their ballots for Obama aren't betrayed in silence, without a peep of protest. As our government continues to fight an endless "war on terrorism," with some of the same commanders and tactics – albeit fronted by the smiling face of a popular president – Antiwar.com is speaking truth to power. And we're almost alone in doing so.

That's got to be worth something.

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So please – take the time, right now, to make your contribution if you haven't already donated. If you have donated, please consider upping your donation, or signing on to our monthly sustainers' program. We don't have the big bucks at the War Party's command – all we have is you.

Yes, I know, it's tiresome to be hectored, especially for money, but we don't have much choice. So [contribute today](#) – and make this fundraising campaign go away!

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