

By William Blum

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Last month, Alan S. Hoffman, an American professor from Washington University in St. Louis, was forbidden by the US Treasury Department to travel to Cuba to give classes in a course on biomaterials. [7](#)

At the same time, the State Department refused to grant two Cuban diplomats in Washington, DC permission to travel to New York City to speak at The Left Forum, the largest annual gathering of the left in the United States, which this year attracted over 5,000 people. [8](#)

The State Department has also been occupied recently with preventing Cuba from being invited to the Summit of the Americas in Colombia in April. [9](#)

And that's just the past month.

I mention all this to keep in mind the next time President Obama or one of his supporters lists US relations with Cuba as one of his accomplishments.

And I still cannot go to Cuba legally.

Another claim the Obamabots are fond of making to defend their man is that he's abolished torture. That sounds very nice, but there's no good reason to accept it at face value. Shortly after Obama's inauguration, both he and Leon Panetta, the new Director of the CIA, explicitly stated that "rendition" was not being ended. As the Los Angeles Times reported: "Under executive orders issued by Obama recently, the CIA still has authority to carry out what are known as renditions, secret abductions and transfers of prisoners to countries that cooperate

with the United States." [10](#)

The English translation of "cooperate" is "torture". Rendition is equal to torture. There was no other reason to take prisoners to Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Egypt, Jordan, Kenya, Somalia, Kosovo, or the Indian Ocean island of Diego Garcia, to name some of the known torture centers frequented by the home of the brave. Kosovo and Diego Garcia — both of which house very large and secretive American military bases — if not some of the other locations, may well still be open for torture business. The same for Guantánamo. Moreover, the executive order concerning torture, issued January 22, 2009 — "Executive Order 13491 — Ensuring Lawful Interrogations" — leaves loopholes, such as being applicable only "in any armed conflict". Thus, torture by Americans outside environments of "armed conflict", which is where much torture in the world happens anyway, is not prohibited. And what about torture in a "counter-terrorism" environment?

One of Mr. Obama's orders required the CIA to use only the interrogation methods outlined in a revised Army Field Manual. However, using the Army Field Manual as a guide to prisoner treatment and interrogation still allows solitary confinement, perceptual or sensory deprivation, sleep deprivation, the induction of fear and hopelessness, mind-altering drugs, environmental manipulation such as temperature and perhaps noise, and possibly stress positions and sensory overload.

After Panetta was questioned by a Senate panel, the *New York Times* wrote that he had "left open the possibility that the agency could seek permission to use interrogation methods more aggressive than the limited menu that President Obama authorized under new rules ... Mr. Panetta also said the agency would continue the Bush administration practice of 'rendition' — picking terrorism suspects off the street and sending them to a third country. But he said the agency would refuse to deliver a suspect into the hands of a country known for torture or other actions "that violate our human values."

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Just as no one in the Bush and Obama administrations has been punished in any way for war crimes in Iraq, Afghanistan and the other countries they waged illegal war against, no one has been punished for torture. And, it could be added, no American bankster has been punished for their indispensable role in the world-wide financial torture. What a marvelously forgiving land is America. This, however, does not apply to Julian Assange and Bradley Manning.

In the last days of the Bush White House, Michael Ratner, professor at Columbia Law School and former president of the Center for Constitutional Rights, pointed out:

The only way to prevent this from happening again is to make sure that those who were responsible for the torture program pay the price for it. I don't see how we regain our moral stature by allowing those who were intimately involved in the torture programs to simply walk off the stage and lead lives where they are not held accountable. <sup>12</sup>

I'd like at this point to remind my dear readers of the words of the "Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment", which was drafted by the United Nations in 1984, came into force in 1987, and ratified by the United States in 1994. Article 2, section 2 of the Convention states: "No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture."

Such marvelously clear, unequivocal, and principled language, to set a single standard for a world that makes it increasingly difficult for one to feel proud of humanity. We cannot slide back.

7. Prensa Latina (Cuba), March 18, 2012

8. See the video description on [Cuba's UN Ambassador at Left Forum '12](#)

9. BBC News, ["Ecuador to boycott Americas summit over Cuba exclusion"](#), April 3, 2012

10. Los Angeles Times, February 1, 2009

11. New York Times, February 6, 2009

12. Associated Press, November 17, 2008