

# Bush Ducks Flying Shoes -- Any Footwear for Donald Rumsfeld?

**Joseph A. Palermo**

Posted December 15, 2008 | 10:18 AM (EST)

George W. Bush apparently thought it would be a good idea before he leaves office to go to Iraq and take a final victory lap, a sort of "farewell tour." But he ended up giving the world a set of lasting images that are fitting testimonials to the bloodiest failure of a presidency plagued with thousands of them. "This is a goodbye kiss, you dog!" yelled an Iraqi television journalist, Muthathar al Zaidi, as he hurled both of his shoes right at Bush's head. Ducking nimbly (I guess all those hours in the gym paid off) the shoes just missed the president's face by a few inches but the video of the incident immediately became a viral sensation on the Internet. Given the power of footwear in Iraqi culture to symbolically disgrace people it was a potent insult aimed at Bush. At least two other Iraqi journalists called Zaidi's shoe toss "courageous." The American press might learn a thing or two from the Iraqi journalists. Members of the White House press corps gave Bush a free ride when he brought the nation to war on false pretenses. He didn't even have to duck their softball questions, let alone a pair of their shoes.

Bush's reception in Baghdad came at the same time a long-awaited report from the Office of the Special Inspector General for Iraq Reconstruction was released showing conclusively that the Bush Administration botched the most important aspect of the whole Iraq operation: rebuilding the country. By the middle of 2008 the American taxpayer had spent over \$50 billion on reconstruction aid for Iraq but there has been little progress. Most of the money was frittered away through deception, waste, poor planning, and corruption. The report, titled "Hard Lessons: The Iraq Reconstruction Experience," is an internal secret history of the Iraq reconstruction project somewhat similar to the Pentagon Papers of the Vietnam era. The *New York Times* yesterday summarized its findings: "Tables in the history show that measures of things like the national production of electricity and oil, public access to potable water, mobile and landline telephone service and the presence of Iraqi security forces all plummeted by at least 70 percent, and in some cases all the way to zero, in the weeks after the invasion." And nearly six years later, oil production is still below pre-war levels, electricity is spotty or non-existent in much of the country, and the availability of potable water has increased only modestly. In other words, the biggest U.S. foreign reconstruction project since the Marshall Plan can be chalked up as another miserable failure of the presidency of George W. Bush. No wonder Iraqi journalists are pitching their shoes at him. Even Karl Rove and his "legacy project" are going to have a hard time spinning this catastrophe.

Donald Rumsfeld emerges as a key villain in the report insisting that the United States did not have to worry about rebuilding the country it had destroyed. "If you think we're going to spend a billion dollars of our money over there," he told James Garner, the first viceroy in Iraq, "you are sadly mistaken." What followed was a horrific combination of imperial hubris, arrogance, and incompetence that Rummy himself came to personify.

During the run up to the war there was never any doubt the United States had the power to overthrow the government in Baghdad so the key question always was: Then what? Donald Rumsfeld never had to answer that pivotal question during all of his egomaniacal press conferences because the corporate media never pressed it. Whenever the issue did come up Bush mouthpieces served up nonsense about being greeted with flowers and chocolates or that stabilizing the country would be a cakewalk or the reconstruction would be paid for with oil revenues, etc. Everyone but Rummy seemed to understand that rebuilding Iraq was just as important as toppling the government.

Rumsfeld also surfaces in another recent government document that sought to discover the roles of high-ranking officials behind the widespread torture and abuse of detainees. The Senate Armed Services Committee released an executive summary of a still largely classified report concluding that Rumsfeld, as secretary of defense, bore major responsibility for the abuses committed by American troops at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Thus, a Senate committee has concluded that Rumsfeld is guilty of war crimes for

condoning torture as the head of the Defense Department.

"The Senate Armed Services Committee Inquiry into the Treatment of Detainees in U.S. Custody" states in its summary: "Conclusion 13: Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's authorization of aggressive interrogation techniques for use at Guantanamo Bay was a direct cause of detainee abuse there. Secretary Rumsfeld's December 2, 2002 approval of Mr. [William] Haynes's recommendation that most of the techniques contained in GTMO's October 11, 2002 request be authorized, influenced and contributed to the use of abusive techniques, including military working dogs, forced nudity, and stress positions, in Afghanistan and Iraq." The executive summary closes by stating: "Conclusion 19: The abuse of detainees at Abu Ghraib in late 2003 was not simply the result of a few soldiers acting on their own. Interrogation techniques such as stripping detainees of their clothes, placing them in stress positions, and using military working dogs to intimidate them appeared in Iraq only after they had been approved for use in Afghanistan and at GTMO. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld's December 2, 2002 authorization of aggressive interrogation techniques and subsequent interrogation policies and plans approved by senior military and civilian officials conveyed the message that physical pressures and degradation were appropriate treatment for detainees in U.S. military custody. What followed was an erosion in standards dictating that detainees be treated humanely."

This new Senate report raises the simple question: If Private Lynndie England served 521 days in a military brig for her crimes interrogating detainees at Abu Ghraib, shouldn't Donald Rumsfeld do a little time himself for authorizing the behavior for which she was condemned?

Rumsfeld's utter contempt for the U.S. Congress continues unabated. His lawyer, Keith Urbahn, responded to the Senate Armed Services Committee report this way: "Because of irresponsible charges by a few individuals in positions of responsibility in Congress, millions of people around the world have been led to believe that the United States condones torture." Here we have a sleaze-ball lawyer (Urbahn) who represents an unelected former U.S. official (Rummy) attacking the U.S. Congress for doing its job of informing the American people about the actions of their own government. The hubris continues.

The sad truth is that high officials in the Bush Administration knowingly violated U.S. and international law by ordering American military and intelligence personnel to torture prisoners who were terrorism suspects. The use of torture spread like a virus. And by asserting the primacy of the will of the torturer (the State) over the individual, the Bush Administration established itself as being above the law. The "rights" of the individual under the law were stripped away.

Therefore, in my view, the only way to really show the world, especially Iraqis, that the United States is no longer in the torture business is to prosecute criminally Donald Rumsfeld and other top Bush officials, bring them to justice, and sentence them to lengthy prison terms. There must be accountability. Only then could we begin to repair the damage that has been done.

There are not enough shoes in the world to express adequately the outrages the world has endured from the Bush Administration over the past eight years. Don Rumsfeld was once a member of the Illinois congressional delegation. If we can't prosecute Rummy for abetting torture maybe we can link him to Rod Blagojevich and indict him for influence peddling.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-a-palermo/bush-ducks-flying-shoes\\_b\\_151062.html?view=print](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/joseph-a-palermo/bush-ducks-flying-shoes_b_151062.html?view=print)